Feature Paper:

**(Dis)placed Identity:**
A Textual Analysis of Writings by Musa El-Husseini

*Omar El-Husseini*

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**The Mediterranean Sea as a Camp**

*Isabelle Anne Edler*

**Camping Migrants on Europe’s Frontlines**
Between Detention and Reception 'Detention'

*Merna Abdelazim*

**The Uyghur Ethnoreligious Identity**

*Domestic Diversion in a Post-9/11 Context*

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**A Benign Force**

*The (Un)making of British State*

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**La Nouba des Femmes du Mont**

*A portrait of Algerian Women in the Aftermath of the War of Independence*

*Amina Abdel-Halim*
Table of Contents

Message from the Editor
Dr. Shourideh C. Molavi 03

(Dis)placed Identity: A Textual Analysis of Writings by Musa El-Husseini
Omar El-Husseini 04

The Mediterranean Sea as a Camp
Isabelle Anne Edler 18

Camping Migrants on Europe’s Frontlines: Between Detention and Reception ‘Detention’
Merna Abdelazim 26

The Uyghur Ethno-religious Identity: Domestic Diversion in a Post-9/11 Context
Ibrahim Abd-El-Barr 36

A Benign Force: The (Un)making of British State Identity
Jonathan Hearn 51

La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoua (1979): A portrait of Algerian Women in the Aftermath of the War of Independence
Amina Abdel-Halim 61

Author Biography
73
It is my great pleasure to have served as Editor of *Khamasin*, the Journal of the Department of Political Science at the American University in Cairo. Building on our work in the previous publication, the papers in this second Spring 2020 issue speak directly to our present political context where questions of exclusion, displacement, historical trauma, identity formation, racial violence and state policy are interrogated. The authors in this issue completed their submissions under difficult conditions of lockdown and isolation, while also living through a historical moment where communities around the world were confronting governments with their colonial and imperial legacies and ongoing racialized structures of violence. As such, we have collectively decided to adopt a black square as our cover—both to stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement that calls for action to address enduring injustices faced by black people, but also to highlight the connected legacies of racialized violence and structural inequalities that continue to play out in Egypt and our region so as to link these struggles. My sincere thanks to these authors, to our incredible Chair, and to the Department of Political Science for their logistical and administrative support of the ongoing publication of *Khamasin*.

Sincerely,

Dr. Shourideh C. Molavi  
*Editor, April 2020*
(Dis)placed Identity

A Textual Analysis of Writings by Musa El-Husseini

By: Omar El-Husseini

In many regards a scholarly infatuation with the relationship between literature and politics may be observed at the core of 20th century politics. The facilitation in the ability to produce independent literature at the time allowed many individuals to transcend the obstacle of unilateral depictions of history by state or quasi-state actors. The contextual amalgam of socio-political contexts and modern weapons of destruction led to large scale military conflicts such as World Wars I and II, this ultimately led to large scale infrastructural annihilation, forced migrations, death, economic downfall and exile. All of which have been the focus of literature of the era, most notably, exile. Described as a fate worse than death\(^1\) in Plato’s apology in the 4th century BCE and yet remains the constant to many who have experienced it in the 20th century CE, more than 2400 years later.

In this paper I will conduct a textual analysis of the unpublished writings of a Palestinian refugee from Jerusalem who lived in exile in Cairo;

\(^1\) Platōn, G. M. A. Grube, and John M. Cooper. Five Dialogues Eutyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2002) Plato’s Apology 37b5-7
Musa El-Husseini. The writings, comprised of poems and short stories, that examine notions of displacement, identity formation, exile and political violence. This paper does not aim to merely demonstrate emotions of pain or loss, but rather demonstrate how these under-lying emotions have influenced and manifested themselves, whether intentional or otherwise, in the writings of Musa El-Husseini. This paper will also attempt to present how such frustrations evident in sentiments of loss, displacement, helplessness, and hopelessness are exemplified in characters, plots, events and contexts of fictional fables and stories. Fictional literature provides a certain level of intrinsic sentimental value that might not be intended but is nonetheless evident in the written piece. Many of the stories presented may also include the use of allegories as a concealed avenue to depict such frustrations, which may be a result of what Hannah Arendt explained as the burden of maintaining a veneer of optimism within a society that encourages forgetting the past and moving forward. To present this I will first introduce the Palestinian exodus as one of many devastating tragedies of the mid-20th century that affected the lives of thousands of Palestinians and their descendants. I will then introduce the author, Musa El-Husseini, within this context as an exiled refugee. Following this I will introduce the author’s writings to which I will conduct a textual analysis by utilizing previous scholarship that shapes the theoretical discourses in the fields of refugeehood and exile.

Arguably one of the greatest tragedies resulting from large scale conflict of the 20th century was the 1948 Palestinian exodus. Rightfully or otherwise, both Palestinian and Israeli adherents have asserted their claims to the lands of Mandatory-Palestine through either continuous and extended historical occupation or as religious and spiritual birthplace respectively. However, the arguments of occupation have many discrepancies from both sides. Both disputing sides have attempted to connect the events of the 1948 declaration of the state of Israel after decades of European migrations to the area, and the subsequent Arab-Israeli War with their assertions to the land today. However, each has adopted a series of distinct versions of events and drawn conclusions accordingly. Steven Glanzer offers a piece in which he examines the conflicting accounts of the exodus provided by Palestinian and Israeli accounts, he then concludes by offering a coherent timeline of the most probable occurrences. Glanzer quotes the UN mediator in Palestine, who at the time of the declaration of the state of Israel reported that «the exodus of the Palestinian Arabs resulted from panic created by fighting in their communities, by rumours concerning real or alleged acts of terrorism, or expulsion. Almost the whole of the Arab population fled or was expelled from the area under Jewish occupation.»

It is

4 Ibid.
hence made clear by both Glanzer and Pappe that the mass migration of Palestinians was a forced one, and one that was accompanied by many violations and atrocities including mass killings (some of which amount to massacres), rape, mass detention and complete obliteration of infrastructure. This series of brutalities accompanied by exile is one that ultimately sparked a series of literature by a large number of individuals and scholars. Such independent literature on sensitive topics provides a primary resource that demonstrates how different forces of history have acted upon persons and societies.

To reflect the positionality of the author within the Palestinian exodus and status of refugeehood an account of Musa El-Husseini’s life will be provided describing major aspects and events of his life to add another dimension of analysis. Husseini’s widow, Mahassen Maamari, explained that Husseini, 21 years old at the time, had moved to exile in Cairo in May of 1948, where the family was located to an area called Hijaz on the outskirts of what was then greater Cairo (Heliopolis). While Hijaz-square is currently at the center of Cairo, at the time of the family’s forced relocation this was considered the most eastern limits of Cairo, probably reflecting the family’s unreadiness to integrate. Husseini and his family immediately gained status in Egypt, renewable every 5 years, as refugees in Egypt. Maamari explains that the family would, for years, keep clothing in their travel bags, convinced that return was only a matter of time, a degree of optimism that would slowly be shattered in the following years.

It is important to note that the Husseini family’s ties to Palestine can be traced to centuries before and are still deeply entrenched in the Palestinian call to independence. Many members of the Husseini family have been seen as figures of Palestinian liberty and revolution, these members include Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini (commander of the Army of the Holy-War), Faisal Al-Husseini (prominent Palestinian politician), Kamil Al-Husseini & Haj Amin El-Husseini (Muftis of Jerusalem), and others. Musa El-Husseini would begin his fascination with writing as a child and would continue to do so until the very beginnings of the 21st century. Husseini would hence witness and be substantially influenced by events of, and prior to, the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Palestinian exodus, the First and Second Intifada’s, signing of the Oslo Accords and a number of other occurrences.

To attempt to solidify emotions and sentiments of exile, displacement and loss is to commit a violent act of reducing and confining an emotion that is fundamentally inexplicable. In addition, to compare such emotions to others who have experienced exile would also be to oversimplify, belittle and standardize very intense unique experiences. It is also extremely difficult to capture the elusive nature of memory and emotion, from a person who is among us, let alone one that has passed. However, it may be possible to draw probable explanations or analyses from others who have been in similar positions, notwithstanding that these experiences are regarded as unique to the individual and their context.

I will first present previous academia that informs the main themes and motifs in relation to the intersection of literature and exile, after which I will introduce the literature by Husseini, providing a summary of three of

his writings from different substantial phases of identity formation and reformation in his life as a refugee in his life. The stories addressed in the following paper are «أشكرك» Thank You, «اليانصيب» The Lottery and «العالم المفقود» The Lost World (appendix I-III respectively) and will be introduced respectively. I will also provide a concise analysis of relevant notions in each. Then I will create an in-depth analysis of the notions apparent to sketch a spatiotemporal map of the context in which the writing process was conducted.

Although every sample provided is from a different location and time, it is important to note themes that have been seen to reoccur in the generality of the works. Unmistakably, each of the three pieces of literature presents a common theme of abrupt ending, sudden and surprising, at times satisfactory and at others not. The endings seem to occur when struggle is at its peak, possibly reflecting a sudden end to Husseini’s life in Palestine at the hand of the unresolved trauma of exile, when the Palestinian struggle was at its most intense. Another recurring motif is potential allegories, allegories may be a result of what Hannah Arendt refers to in her essay We Refugees that describes how forces of expected optimism may present, to her, the same forces that make one loath their own life. In her essay she also demonstrates how exile effectively collapses the relationship between the personal and the political, virtually making all personal stories in one form or another politicized.  

The author also seems to present imaginary worlds and situations, whether explicitly in the case of «العالم المفقود» The Lost World or otherwise implicitly. This idea of the creation of worlds was first introduced by Edward Said in his Reflections on Exile Said refers the practice of creating fantasy worlds and stories to the authors’ need to make up for the worlds and stories they lost.  

Husseini uses, in all the writings presented, a technique better described as ‘the stream of consciousness’ rather than an internal monologue, which differ in that streams of consciousness are generally less organized, repetitive and more representative of the human cognition rather than structured literature. Streams of Consciousness portray hesitation exemplified in failure to complete thought, if so occurs, it is a natural depiction of human reasoning and the thought process.

«أشكرك» Thank You is a short poem of a woman, speaking in first person, to a man, her husband. In the poem she thanks him, thanks him for the abuse, the pain, for tying her up and beating her. She claims the marks of her beating, the bruises and the blood as military medals and badges of honor. Throughout the poem she asserts her admiration of the shackles her husband has tied her with, she explains didn't know they had such an effect on her until they were removed, only by her infidelity did she know his worth, only he can decide her fate and only he can carry it out, with his hand, legs or with his beating stick left behind the door of her exiled room.

It is hard to pinpoint when the poem was exactly produced however, the poem was

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found in a group of untouched documents since the 1960s, we can only assume this was produced in the first years of Hussein’s move to Cairo. The poem maintains a rather heavy, gruesome and painful air. The poem’s intense macabre aura may be interpreted to transcend an unfaithful relationship and rather perhaps amount to sentiments of being infidelity to a nation. The first wave of exodus from Palestine, is widely regarded as one for the weak and the disloyal, those who failed to fight the occupation. The poem may allude to the author’s sentiments of regret and feelings of being untrue to his nation, and hence the poem harbors deep emotions of; loss, longing and helplessness.

However, there is a great deal of thorough description of graphic violence that the speaker is subjected to by her lover/loved one. While this may superficially be the case, the shift is one which draws attention to an awareness of specific dynamics revealing the state of the Palestinian people, as inhabitants who have been emasculated, stripped of their dignity, to the point where the only voice or position that they are able to take is that of an abused, degraded, violated, battered female. The use of the feminine voice can demonstrate V. Spike Peterson’s idea of binary association of masculinity vis-à-vis femininity in the context of hierarchical dichotomies of power-weakness, male-female, reason-emotion, state-society, colonizer-colonized. It might also aid in displaying how these associations may affect expression in literature and our perception of the world and the world order.

Yet, there is a clear air of resistance as it seems odd that she boasts the wounds and bruises - and in so doing, her body is presented as a site of resistance. In which her injuries are described as medals and the rank insignia on a soldier’s shoulder expressing her rise in ranks. One might also realize that the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, the master and the slave is disrupted by her desire for punishment, in her confession of her transgression. The elaborate nature of this violence might be understood as sadomasochistic, given the relationship between the speaker and the way that she is addressing her lover. Marquis de Sade explains that in a sadomasochistic relationship, both participants cannot enjoy the practice concurrently and hence one person’s enjoyment strips the other of that exact emotion. To extrapolate that to the poem at hand, we see that by presenting the female’s enjoyment precisely as someone who is garnering pleasure from the pain being inflicted upon her, it thereby completely disrupts the master-slave, colonizer-colonized, powerful-powerless, or state-society, relationship, making this poem ultimately one of resistance in its expression of complete submission.

shrubs on top. The journalist exclaims at how serene and astonishingly beautiful this area is, to which the discoverer then asks him to turn the page, and as the journalist complies, he is met by a huge and terrifying creature, one he describes as one that could only come out of a nightmare.

To properly address this piece it is important to recognize the geology of the area of the Amazon as one that is predominantly composed of tropical rainforests, because of its extremely wet climate the Amazon has very few sandy areas and does not match the description of the area provided. It is also important to note that the author has never been to Amazon.

The geology of the area described, however, is remarkably similar to an area called الخان الأحمر (Khan al-Ahmar) which literally translates to The Red Caravansary. A small roadside village where caravanners or travelers could rest from a day’s journey, this area is located on the outskirts of Jerusalem and specifically the old city, where the author resided for the first 21 years of his life, before the Palestinian exodus. The small red hills and tiny shrubs are a staple of the area, the red tint is a result of the iron-oxide-tinged limestone forming the red-brown color on the hills.

It is revealed at the very end that the other side of those beautiful hills bears a frightening creature, which may be an allegory to the Israeli occupation. Following the previous detailed descriptions and intense build-up of not only the physical appearance of the “adventurer” or “traveler” who the narrator has encountered preceded by accounts of his reputation and who have expressed disbelief of his stories, and curiously, a degree of annoyance with the figure, is all of this is brought to an abrupt unexpected termination, as the picturesque image described is transformed or the page is turned over to reveal*. The short story concludes with the author witnessing «the strangest possible monster [so huge and terrifying] ...one that could only come out of a nightmare.» The creature is so gruesome and overwhelming, that it effectively consumes the narrator, the figure that had been so elaborately described previously, and in fact consumes and terminates everything, including the story itself. The Palestinian exodus, a brutal ending, is somehow at odds with more romanticized accounts of «home» and exile in the minds of those who were forced to leave. “Home” to an exile is typically presented as an idyllic place, that is in one stroke, wiped from the very face of the earth, completely gone. The idea of “witnessing” is similar to the concept of “bearing witness” introduced by Tahrir Hamdi in her article Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature. Hamdi explains that many resistance authors use the notion of “bearing witness” to a tragedy, whether fictional or not, as a tool to guard the need for liberation.

The Lottery is a short story of a poor young man, writing in first person, who lives alone and works in the governmental sector. As he sits at a café he decides, after many days of nagging, to buy a lottery ticket from the shabby man who attempts to sell them to him on a daily basis. The young man buys the ticket, and neatly puts in his wallet

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and goes home to get ready for bed. As he attempts to sleep his mind cannot rest and the ideas of what he will do with the grand prize flood him, including the recognition, titles and items he will attain. As he continues to think he begins to realize the negative impacts this money will have on his life, impacts range from governmental obligations to how it will limit him socially, make others loathe him and desire his money in the most sinister of ways. As he becomes more and more restless, he suddenly walks out of bed and tears the lottery ticket, only then could he sleep calmly and comfortably.

The interpretation of this short story may provide a rather concealed intrinsic value, one demonstrating a shift of identity from refugee to citizen, where the person attains recognition and rights, but also obligations and loss of previous identity. The protagonist only feels comfortable and is only able to sleep when he is assured there is no hope of becoming rich, poverty has become part and parcel of his identity, as statelessness and refugeehood have represented the cornerstone of the author’s identity. The author also includes a dimension of governmental integration, in which a poor person does not have as many obligations to a government in which a rich individual would. Emma Haddad analyzes this aspect of identity in her article The Refugee: The Individual Between Sovereigns, she explains that the refugee’s identity is shaped primarily by his/her lack of association with a state,15 So, as a poor individual is in certain regards free of governmental association, a refugee presents a similar congruence, a citizen is heavily reliant on a state to formulate their identity.

From the stories presented a spatio-temporal map can be drawn that reflects all three pieces of literature and their contexts. A spatiotemporal view of the literature places Thank You at the beginning of the author’s move to Egypt, between 19481949-, and hence may provide reason as to why the author presents the main protagonist as one that is defiled and violated, yet as demonstrated above a sense of resistance is still apparent. The Lost World was produced between the years of 19671971-, within the timeframe of Al-Naksa, marking Israel’s victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. This may present justification as to why the story seems to end with the figure of a creature essentially consuming and terminating the story, possibly referring to the termination of the author’s hope of return from exile. This may be supported by the fact that the author had remarried, an indication of long-term settlement, only two years after Al-Naksa possibly referring to the author’s shift to realizing that his hopes for return were no longer possible in the near future. The Lottery, was produced during the author’s years in Canada and was one of his last literary productions, the document was found in the basement of Husseini’s house in Canada approximately five years after his passing. The document’s referral to a poor young man who buys a lottery ticket, essentially demonstrating a shift to monetary security may reference the author obtaining citizenship in Canada which then reflects a form of political security. Emma Haddad analyzes identity in her article The Refugee: The Individual Between Sovereigns, explaining that the refugee’s identity is shaped primarily by his/her lack of association with a state and being a constant foreigner. Once incorporated by the state in which he/she resides the refugee loses

a central part of their identity. Haddad goes even further with her argument to suggest that, once outside the national mode of belonging, refugees and exiles act to emphasize the constructs surrounding the nation-state, essentially creating a contrast between themselves and the other, to which the refugee identity can be perpetuated. Perhaps, to the author, his newly attained Canadian citizenship then undermines his identity as a Palestinian refugee and essentially reformulates his identity, as money would reformulate the identity of a poor individual.

The piece is in essence an extended stream of consciousness, which has been described before, it is exemplified in that only four instances of action occur; buying the ticket, becoming increasingly restless while attempting to sleep, drinking water multiple times from becoming increasingly stressed, and finally cutting destroying the ticket. The four occurrences describe a beginning and an end that are identical with only sufferance in between, possibly reflecting the course of a life the author wishes to lead in which he returns from exile with only years of suffering in between. However this story, as well as all the others mentioned in this paper, fundamentally transpire in whole or in part in the mind of the author, they are an internal dilemma that manifests itself in the mind, giving no opportunity or space for the characters to act, the stories seem to hold a certain air of simultaneous freedom and captivity. Where one is only sound before they commit an action that is so regrettable that they hope they had never committed it, be that; infidelity, purchasing a ticket or as simple as flipping a page. The stories are unilateral depictions of an internalized conflict that may or may not manifest in action. I argue that this occurs primarily as a reflection of the author’s inability to manifest many of his thoughts and emotions longing for return from materializing, the desire and longing for return can only live in the mind and is in a sense freeing as it is confining.

The writings offered within this paper, which are comprised of poems and short stories, examine the notions of exile and displacement, political violence, identity formation and reformation. The Paper uses previous scholarship by Edward Said, Hannah Arendt, Tahrir Hamdi, Emma Haddad, Marquis de Sade, and Spike Peterson to outline how such notions of exile can be implicitly communicated in a variety of manners and for a variety of reasons, whether intentional or otherwise. It is important to realize that the collapse of the personal and the political for the exile ultimately dictates that almost every activity, let alone expression within writing, becomes a political gateway or tool, to express intense emotions that one might not be able to in their daily lives.

16 Ibid, 309
17 Ibid, 311
Bibliography


Appendix I: Thank You

«أشكرك:»

أشكرك لأنك منذ يومين فقدتني بالحذاء...
و أشكرك لأنك أمس أدميت ذراعي...
و اليوم...أوصدت الأبواب في وجهي...
و صفعتي...و ركلتي...و هذة الليلة الزرقاء...و الخضراء و البنية لياسين...قاتادات...
و هذه الليلة خذني بصفادي...
بكادمتي و جروحي...و معك السوط...إضرب به حبيتك!!
لاني و بدون أن تكون معي...و خلف ظهرك...
وقتت عيني على رجل قارنته...
قارنته بحبيبي...
حتى أن الجدران أصاحت السمع إلى كلماته...
و هو يحثني و يقسم...
و صار يمد لي يده...
و تحركت بما جراء أمام فوتك...
و كانت تفوهك و أسفادك و سلالك...
كلاها وقع الجنون عندما تحركت...
صدقني...يا اللبكة...لم أعرف...
لم أعرف أن لها مثل هذا الواقع...
و حالته دوني و دونه...
و عرفت قيمتك و علمت...
أتي فقط لك وحذك...
Appendix II: The Lost World
كان البائع رته الزيت نحليًا، أما بضاعته فرزمة من أوراق اليانصيب يحملها بين يديه و هو يصيح: ألف جنيه و السحب الليلة!
ذلك نداءه كل يوم لا يحيد عنه إلا قليلاً حسب حالته النفسية من سرور أو حزن.

و كانت أرقامه من زاويته في المطعم المتواضع الذي اعتدت أن أتناول عشاءي فيه و هو يروح و يجيء ثم عندما يراني يقترب مني و هو يقول: البريمو ألف جنيه و السحب الليلة.
و لم أشتر قط منه ورقة اليانصيب، مع ذلك لم يكن اليأس يتسرب إلى قلبي و كان برغم رفضي يحضر إلي كل ليلة و هو يحمل نداءه و أمله، و خطر لي يوماً أن اشتري فعلاً شيئاً من سلعته....فندت عليه قبل أن يقترب مني و رأيته يحث الخطا نحوي و قد تولاه أمل عظيم أكثر من أي وقت مضى.
و فرد الأوراق على المائدة و هو يقول: البريمو... ألف جنيه.
و تخترت ورقة كبيرة مزدانة باللون الأحمر و الازرق و نقدته عشرة قروش ثمنها. و حاول أن يبيعني أوراق أخرى من فئات أقل أو أكثر دون جدوى و دس القروش العشرة في جيبه وهو يدمد.. البريمو... البريمو.
ثم مالبت أن خرج و طويت الورقة بعناية بعد أن ألقيت عليها نظرية فاحصة و تمليت من رقمها الذي كان يعد فوق العشرة آلاف...
و قرأت موعد السحب الذي كان يصادف أكثر من خمسة عشر يومًا...
و ضمت قبضة يدي و رفعتها في الهواء و انا أصيح: إنني لن أطمع في أعناقهم أو أشياءهم.
و ضمت قبضة يدي و رفعتها في الهواء و انا أصيح: إنني لن أطمع في أعناقهم أو أشياءهم.
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أغمضت عيني..و أستدعت الوسادة..و أحسست بالعطش..فقمت و شربت..ثم عدت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش و لكنني ما كنت أن اضع رأسي على الوسادة حتى قلت في نفسي..أضع الألف جنيه في البنك؟ إذن ما استفدتها؟..كانني لا أملكها..ولكن أن أصرف منها لاحظت أنني أريد أن أعيش عيشة أفضل و لن أكون كالبخلاء يملكون كثيراً من النقود و لكنهم يعيشون فقراء..انني احتاج أن أضع التغيير في أثاث المنزل الذي أكل الدهر عليه و شرب..انني احتاج إلى ملايين داخلية بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضمير، أما الآن أنا غني..و نستطيع أن نتناول طعاماً في مكان أفضل ووجبات أكثر نظافة و نعومة..و رجعت مرة أخرى إلى الفراش..و لما كنت احتاج إلى ملايين بدلاً من القميص و خارجية بدلاً من السراويل..و إلي عدة أزواج من الأحذية بدلاً من الأحذية الداكنة و أسود مع النبي..ستحاصر طعامي في مطعم أكثر نزولاً لإثارة من هذا المطعم القذر الذي ارى صراصيره تنقير أمام عيني و أنا صامت راضي..فلا فيهما ضmir...
The Mediterranean Sea as a Camp

By: Isabelle Anne Edler

No right to have rights?

As a European citizen I believed for a long time in the actual implementation of ‘the European values’, such as respect for human dignity and human rights in the European Union. Of course, there were unfortunate exceptions; humans who for any reason had to suffer under unjust and unlawful conditions. But they were exceptions... It never came to my mind that these exceptions might actually constitute part of the norm and that they are, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben states, “in some sense […] the hidden matrix and nomos of the political space in which we still live” (AGAMBEN 2000: 36). Hannah Arendt’s famous realization that there is no “right to have rights” (ARENDT 1958: 298) might in fact still be true for the European Union.

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2 There is no doubt that Hanna Arendt formulated this sentence precisely in a European context in which unprecedented horror and inhumanity manifested itself through systematic mass murder on the European Jews in Nazi Germany and the refusal of other European states to grand save refuge.
The Mediterranean Sea. There is hardly any other space within the sovereign control of states belonging to the European Union where these exceptions, the absence of rights for certain humans, is more visible and permanent. In this case, it is the figure of the ‘irregular’ migrant that becomes deprived of all rights, left behind in the sea with nothing but his ‘bare life’, his physical existence. Over 19,000 ‘irregular’ migrants have lost their lives in the last six years trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

The increased arrival of those who survived this deadly passage in the European Union in the last decade is regularly depicted as a security threat and referred to as “the migrant crisis” by numerous spokesmen of the European Union. It is precisely this idea of a crisis that justifies the permanent state of exception and, as will be claimed in this essay, turns the Mediterranean Sea into a camp. (AGAMBEN 2000: 39).

For stating this point, this reading will in a first step introduce Agamben’s theoretical considerations on the state of exception and the homo sacer and apply it on the figure of the ‘irregular’ migrant. Following this, Agamben’s theory on the camp as a permanent state of exception will be outlined and transferred to the example of the Mediterranean Sea. Lastly, the essay will present possibilities for non-sovereign actors to interfere in this permanent state of exception by introducing two cases of successful private sea rescue before closing with a conclusion of the findings.

No rights for ‘naked life’ – How the ‘irregular’ migrant becomes a homo sacer

The state of exception describes a “temporary suspension of the order” (AGAMBEN 2000: 42) created in a supposed emergency or danger for the existing order (AGAMBEN 2000: 38). It is a situation that is outside the regular law, an exception of the law that is still included in the law (AGAMBEN 1998: 12). Tracing back to Carl Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty, Agamben argues that the sovereign is the one deciding on the state of exception (AGAMBEN 1998: 13). The state of exception creates the possibility of revoking humans of their political rights, turning them into a modern version of the ancient Roman figure of the homo sacer. Homo sacer, a person deprived of his protection under the law, of his political status as a human in society and left with nothing but his ‘bare life’ (AGAMBEN 1998: 12). Hannah Arendt already stated, that bare physical existence or humanness alone does not bear any kind of rights:

The Rights of Man, after all, had been defined as ‘inalienable’ because they were supposed to be independent of all governments; but it turned out that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them. (ARENDT 1958: 291)

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3 Irregular’ migration commonly describes the “[m]ovement of persons that take place outside the laws, regulations or international agreements governing the entry into or the exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.” (IOM (2019): Key Migration Terms. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION. https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms (last access: 19.11.2019))


6 Agamben describes this as the paradox of sovereignty as “the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order” (AGAMBEN 1998: 17). The sovereign has the power to declare the state of exception and therefore legally revoke the juridical order (ibid.).
It is the ‘irregular’ migrant who constitutes the prototype of the homo sacer in modern times. He is the one most in need of human rights and at the same time the one most deprived from any protection under the law and access to human rights (AGAMBEN 2000: 22; ARENDT 1958: 291). He further reveals the crisis of the modern nation state, in which birth or ‘naked life’ does not immediately transmit into the nation anymore (AGAMBEN 1998: 20).

The exception becomes permanent

The modern nation state is a biopolitical state that “is no longer essentially defined by its territoriality, by the surface occupied, but by a mass: the mass of population, with its volume, its density, and, for sure, the territory it covers, but which is, in a way, only one of its components” (FOUCAULT 2007: 110). In this sense the modern nation state is defined by territory, order and, birth. For a long time, it was the nexus between territory and the state which regulated the inscription of life through birth into the nation. As this mechanism of turning birth into nation increasingly trembles and “enters a period of permanent crisis [...] the state decides to undertake the management of the biological life of the nation directly as its own task” (AGAMBEN 2000: 42). It creates a permanent state of exception, a permanent exclusion of certain humans deprived from their political status, in order to regulate the inscription of ‘bare life’ into the existing order (ibid.). The space where the state of exception becomes permanent and which is inhabited by ‘naked life’ is what Agamben calls the camp. The camp constitutes the ultimate biopolitical space, as inside the camp all politics become biopolitics and all humans become homo sacer (AGAMBEN 2000: 40). In the broken nexus of the old trinity of nation (birth), territory, and state the camp presents the fourth element which now regulates the inscription of ‘bare life’ into the nation (AGAMBEN 2000: 43).

If this is the case, if the essence of the camp consists in the materialization of the state of exception and in the consequent creation of a space for naked life as such, we will then have to admit to be facing a camp virtually every time that such a structure is created, regardless of the nature of the crimes committed in it and regardless of the denomination and specific toponography it might have. (AGAMBEN 2000: 40-41)

The Mediterranean Sea constitutes such a space of permanent exception, a space designed to regulate the inscription of ‘bare life’ into the population of the European Union.

The Mediterranean Sea as a camp

Can a space like the Mediterranean Sea become a camp? A space, flexible and permeable like the sea, with parts belonging to multiple sovereign entities and international waters The European governments constitute the sovereigns in the Mediterranean Sea because there are no other entities operating in the Mediterranean whose power to decide on the state of exception, on laws being applied or suspended, is as strong as theirs.7 Further, European governments’ sovereignty does not end

at the borders of their territory in the Mediterranean Sea. They regularly decide to rescue ‘irregular’ migrants inside sovereign waters of other bordering states of the Mediterranean such as Morocco or Libya. Likewise, there are numerous documented cases of push-backs of migrants from European sovereign territories to the territory of other Mediterranean states, as well as the refusal to rescue even in cases of serious distress inside sovereign waters of EU-member states. But the sovereignty of European governments in the Mediterranean is not just due to their power to decide on the state of exception, they also have the power to decide on who lives and who dies. They are the sovereigns in the sense of Mbembe’s Necropolitics because they can “exercise control over mortality and [...] define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (MBEMBE 2003: 11-12). European governments’ demonstrate this power every day in their decisions on who to rescued, push-back, leave-to-die or ‘welcome’ from the sea to a safe harbor.

The Mediterranean Sea is a camp because it constitutes a permanent state of exception. There is hardly any other space inside the sovereign territory of the European Union in which ‘irregular’ migrants are deprived more evidently of any rights as the Mediterranean Sea. It is “a localization without order” (AGBEN 2000: 43), “a space in which the law is completely suspended [and in which] everything is truly possible” (AGBEN 2000: 39). Basic human rights such as the right to life but also specific maritime laws such as the right to be rescued in distress on sea are regularly evoked from ‘irregular’ migrants on the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, humans intervening into this deadly relation of sovereign and homo sacer by providing assistance and rescue even face criminalization and legal penalty. The so called ‘migration crisis’ is used to justify exceptional measures in ‘times of emergency’, as it is often depicted by European governments (DAVIT 2019: 1173). The Mediterranean Sea also constitutes a camp because it fulfills the function of a camp as described by Agamben. It regulates the inscription of ‘bare life’ into the population of the European Union, often willingly excepting the death and drowning of humans in order to realize this purpose. As Carlotta Smith points out, European governments as sovereigns knowingly create this deadly regulation process by inhibiting efficient ways of legal migration, the closure of less dangerous land crossings and migration routes as well as through the suspension of official rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea. This leads to a significant decrease of ‘irregular’ migrants arriving in the European Union.

It is much easier – practically and politically – to let thousands of people drown at sea than die within a state’s own territory. As such, the creation of the Mediterranean as a camp has

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10 Jacques Derrida in his writing on hospitality points out that the act of welcoming itself is a violent act that goes hand in hand with the imposition of the rules of the host on the guest in order to be welcomed (DERRIDA 2000: 07).
served the specific purpose of managing the whereabouts and number of refugees coming into Europe.\textsuperscript{14}

However, the Mediterranean Sea has some specific characteristics which make it appear quite untypical for a camp. First of all, it is not purposely built as a camp. In fact it is a pre-existing body of water that is turned into a camp. Further, it does not constitute a close system which makes it accessible to various other actors outside the sovereign-homo sacer nexus, such as tourist boats, cargo ships and private sea rescue vessels. And lastly, the Mediterranean Sea presents an entirely different space depending on the status of the person trying to cross it.\textsuperscript{15} While a European citizen can cross the Strait of Gibraltar for a quick daytrip to the white beaches on the northern coast of Morocco, an ‘irregular’ migrant might spend years waiting in the forests at these shores for an opportunity to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Eventually, he might make it to the other side, but he might also very well end up drowning during his attempt to cross these deadly fourteen kilometers such as at least 2687 other migrants did in 2018.\textsuperscript{16} In this sense, the Mediterranean Sea presents a polysemic border that has different meanings and impacts on people, depending on their political and social status (BALIBAR 2002: 81). Yet, this polysemic and accessible character also offers opportunities for non-sovereign actors to interfere in the state of exception and resist the violent process of turning ‘irregular’ migrants into homo sacer.

### Challenging the state of exception – Resistance in the Mediterranean Sea

Relevant actors interfering in this sovereign-homo sacer relation are private sea rescue operators. A prominent example is the Sea Watch 3 vessel, operated by the German Non-Government Organization Sea-Watch and exclusively run by volunteers and funded through donations. Since the beginning of its rescue mission in 2015 Sea-Watch was involved in the rescue of over 37.000 humans in the Mediterranean Sea.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, some of these lifesaving rescue operations caused the vehement criticism and rejection of European governments, as they challenged the sovereigns’ power to decide on life and death. On January 9, 2019 Sea Watch 3 together with another German private rescue vessel was allowed to berth at a Maltese harbor after two weeks on sea waiting for the assignment of a safe harbor. The two vessels had rescued 49 ‘irregular’ migrants on December 22 and December 29 but where not allowed to dock at any harbor as none of the EU member states was willing to welcome these persons in need of protection. After increasing pressure on part of the civil society as well as due to the alarming circumstances on board of the two vessels, seven European governments finally agreed to accept the rescued to enter their countries.\textsuperscript{18,19} A similar case happened in June 2019 when the Sea Watch 3 vessel rescued 53 people in distress in the Mediterranean Sea. Eleven of them were evac-

\textsuperscript{14} ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} ibid.
uated from the vessel by Italian authorities due to serious health constraints, but 42 ‘irregular’ migrants were forced to stay on the Sea Watch 3 for over two weeks, as no European government allowed the rescue vessel to enter a safe harbor. After fourteen days on the sea, the crew of Sea Watch 3 decided to enter Italian sovereign waters without permission and docked at the harbor of Lampedusa on June 26.

This led to the arrest of the captain of the Sea Watch 3 vessel but eventually also to the acceptance of Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Portugal to host the remaining 40 migrants.

The case of Sea Watch 3 shows that a non-sovereign actor can interfere in the state of exception by entering the camp, rescuing ‘bare life’ that is condemned to die and claim rights for those ‘irregular’ migrants previously considered homo sacer. Yet, in the case of the rescue operation in January 2019 the Maltese government used the permission to embark for these rescued migrants to negotiate a deal which resulted in the ‘redistribution’ of 249 other migrants present in Malta to other EU member states. The Maltese government willingly kept 49 ‘irregular’ migrants in the Mediterranean camp in order to be able to negotiate a sort of ‘prisoner exchange’, just that in this case, it is not about wanting those supposed to life back but to get rid of those which were supposed to die.

**Conclusion**

There is a camp under the sovereign control of European governments. A space characterized by its permanent state of exception, by the deprivation of rights of those who are kept inside. A camp that regulates who lives and who dies, which ‘bare life’ is inscribed into the population of the European Union and which is excluded. The analysis of the Mediterranean Sea as a camp discloses the underlying crisis of the modern biopolitical nation state. And it reveals an ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean that is build on the limits of our ‘universal’ human rights system. However, it also presents the Mediterranean camp as an accessible and permeable space for other non-sovereign actors which offers ways of resistance against the state of exception, even though they might be limited and sometimes costly.

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Camping Migrants on Europe’s Frontlines

Between Detention and Reception ‘Detention’

By: Merna Abdelazim

Introduction

The lexicon used to describe the “flows” of migrants arriving to Europe is a militarized one. Since 2015, the European media has described the migratory situation as “the continent’s worst migration crisis since World War Two,” which invoked the European Commission’s proposal of the “hotspot approach” to provide European Union countries facing increasing migratory pressures with operational support.\(^1\) Several European Union bodies refer to the southern European countries as “frontline” states, insinuating that it is a battlefield where the responsibility of protecting the European “frontier” lies on those States bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency or “Frontex”\(^2\) usually uses terms such as “maritime operation” and “operational zone” when referring to border surveillance and Search and Rescue (SAR).\(^3\) All of these terms are generally used in

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2 Established by Regulation (EU) 2016/1624
the language of warfare, and during war, a state of exception is declared. In fact, multiple European Union (EU) States have been trying to qualify hotspot reception centers, which assumes humanitarian welcome and assistance, as spaces of exceptional detention; in order to evade their legal obligations and responsibility for avoiding the arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Nevertheless, the violence in some of the EU countries’ reception centers does not differ from the violence of de jure detention centers; because it is the same sovereign logic of migrant subjugation that operates them.

This paper thus aims to analyze de facto detention in migrant reception centers based on a critical theoretical framework grounded in the scholarship of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, and drawing its evidence from critical reports by several organizations in order to highlight how irregular migrants are being denied provision of basic human rights, mainly the right to liberty, in spaces of hospitality through the states’ biopolitical power using the logic of permanent exception. Case studies are mainly presented from Greece, Italy, and Hungary, because the EU commission labels them as “frontline member states” deeming Europe as a “fortress”. They are also, perhaps as a consequence of the former, the primary countries that are fully implementing “the hotspot approach”.

The irregular migrants as “Homo Sacer

The dynamics that Italian thinker Giorgio Agamben draws from ancient Greek philosophy between Zoe, which is human bare life, and bios, which is political qualified life, bares a lot of significance for the most pressing political issues of today. Influenced by Michel Foucault, he lays understanding of the formation of the modern nation state through the process of the politicization of bare life and the transformation of sovereign power to biopolitical power. Building upon Carl Schmitt’s concept of sovereignty, Agamben notes that the sovereign is unique in its power to suspend the law without repealing it by deciding a state of exception such as emergency or martial laws. Zoe is thus solely included in bios through its exclusion from the political and juridical order through the relation of exception; deeming zoe and bios inseparable in what Agamben calls “the zone of indistinction”. Such state of “inclusive exclusion” is lived by the homo sacer, an abstract figure of ancient Roman law, who is included in the juridical order through his exclusion as a result of committing an illegalized act. Homo sacer becomes both bound by the juridical system, but is abandoned by its protection; he is neither a political subject, nor living bare natural life.

Irregular migrants crossing to Europe are the ultimate figure of homo sacer within the European biopolitical landscape. They are defined as migrating persons whose movement “takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination” as per the definition of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The definition includes both refugees and immigrants, who are subject to the same violence although are entitled to different levels of protection under international law. In this sense, we can understand the European Union (EU) as the sovereign figure standing within law and outside law simultaneously by

4 Agamben, Homo Sacer, 18.
5 IOM Glossary. https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms
virtue of its ability to suspend law in areas of its control and declare “exceptional measures”, and irregular migrants as its mirror image, through the figure of the homo sacer, as they are included in the European system through their ban from society and as a result, revoked from their citizen rights. The migrants are sacred under today’s international conventions in the same ambivalent manner as the homo sacer was sacred to the Roman Gods as a life that cannot be sacrificed, yet can be killed by anyone with impunity. Indeed, a total of 18,701 migrants have been left to die while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe between 2014 and 2019 as their boats capsized outside the narrow EU Member States SAR operational zones. These deaths can be regarded largely as the result of how the EU has retreated its SAR policies at sea after suspending the Mare Nostrum operation and laying responsibility on commercial vessels to fill the rescue gap. This might amount to killing through non-assistance, like a homo sacer, without consequences.

Reception centers as “Agambenian Camps”

When examining the spaces where the state of exception is being practiced, we should not look at prisons or detention facilities as they are run by penal law within the legal order, but rather at camps that constitute any political space in which “the state of exception becomes the rule” by means of normalization and general performativity. All of the camps of today, including reception centers, can be analyzed as being historically born “out of a state of exception and martial law.” The idea of setting “hotspots” on the margins of the European continent resonates with the logic of the colonial concentration camps set by the British in South Africa and the Spanish in Cuba, which were set away from the sovereign center on grounds of defending public safety. Camps also have totalitarian origins from the 20th century, such as the infamous Nazi Auschwitz Camp, which may have provided a framework for ruling through a normalized permanent state of exception located in space and not time in today’s modern liberal democracies. What is common between totalitarian camps and democratic camps is the reduction of its residents to the figure of the homo sacer who can be deprived of rights because they are seen as having lives that are not worth living or constituting a danger to the public body.

An example of how some migrant reception centers in the EU constitute Agambenian camps is through its de facto detention of migrants upon arrival whereas they are “…confined in a place they cannot leave, without being issued a detention order and without their placement being classified as detention by national law.” As reported by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some of the hotspot premises of reception had become places where de facto detention was often observed and regularized, with new arrangements constantly taking place outside the normal juridical structure. The provisions of the Reception Conditions Directive, aimed at harmonizing reception conditions for migrants across EU Member States,

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6 Ibid., 52-53.
7 IOM’s Missing Migrants Project, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean
9 Ibid, 19.
10 Agamben, Means Without Ends, 178.
11 Ibid, 167.
13 Ibid, 168.
14 Asylum Information Database (AIDA) found in Mouzourakis and Pollet. Boundaries of liberty, 8.
15 Grutta. Crossing a Red Line, 22.
16 2013/33/EU.
render detention as an “exceptional measure” that can be allowed across a various range of circumstances. It exposes a wide flexibility left to Member States to practice their sovereign power of applying rules or suspending them.¹⁷ These hotspots have been normalized and even bled into the city whereas for example they can also be used to identify and register every irregular migrant who is detected inside Italian territories and not only those arriving by sea.¹⁸ Such “delocalization” as conceptualized by scholar Mark B. Salter leads to “camping” migrants upon arrival at the borders and the possibility of their “pre-removal” which is similar to the “expedited removal” procedure of the United States (U.S). In both cases, there is no room for administrative or judicial appeal and the migrants are forced to waive their rights (such as to a deportation hearing) in return for ending prolonged detention. Salter notes that in these cases the “rights of applicants are suspended at the border of the community as an exceptional case of normal law.”¹⁹

The hospitality of Reception “Centers on the “frontline”

“Reception” often refers to the act of welcome, often accompanied by service or assistance. However, the conditions at the reception centers of the frontline states prove otherwise. In terms of theory, many scholars such as Seyla Benhabib, drawing upon philosopher Immanuel Kant, emphasize the need to understand the act of hospitality as a cosmopolitan right rather than a mere act of philanthropy. It is the right of foreign visitors not to be treated as enemies when they arrive to another country. However, while hospitality is a legal obligation, it is also not unconditional. A country may refuse to receive a person if this refusal will not cause their destruction. An example of that is the customary legal right protecting refugees from refoulement, or return to where they can be subject to persecution, as stipulated in the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.²⁰ This is problematic for three reasons, first, it entails that a refugee can be refused entry and deported to their first country of asylum where they will not face persecution. Second, the right of non-refoulement only applies to those recognized as refugees as per the criteria set forth in the Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which does not recognize other forms of persecution due to socioeconomic or environmental factors for example. Third, there are discrepancies between obligation and practice as well as variations across EU Member States, deeming the reception of refugees in EU frontline countries more of a restriction of rights and an act of hostility, perhaps unintended. This is manifested in the tension between EU sovereignty (border control) and hospitality.

A classic example is Reception and Identification Centers (RICs) in Greece. As per Article 14 (1) of Greek Law 4375/2016, newly arrived migrants “shall be directly led, under the responsibility of the police or port authorities … to a Reception and Identification Centre.” However due to the 2016 increase in arrivals at Evros at the Greek-Turkish land border, transfers of newcomers to Fylakio RIC have been often delayed to periods exceeding one month. During this time, the migrants are kept in a “pre-removal” detention center until they are received and identified in Fylakio, despite the lack of a legal basis.²¹ As for the regular procedure on the other hotspot is-

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¹⁷ Gruša. Crossing a Red Line, 22.
¹⁸ Ibid., 17.
²⁰ Benhabib. Disaggregation of Citizenship Rights, 11-12.
lands, migrants arriving by sea are transferred to RICs and are subject to a period of 3 – 25 days of prohibition of leaving the RIC, even before asylum seekers complete their initial registration due to preconceiving many of them as economic migrants.

This measure entails that migrants are automatically detained de facto, and hence there are neither individual assessments nor legal remedy in Greek law to challenge it, which is crucial in determining the lawfulness of detention. In 2017, this measure has been largely replaced by “geographical restriction”, which is a prohibition to leave the island where the migrants arrive. However based on the 1980 Guzzardi v Italy case, restriction to a small island under permanent surveillance for months still amounts to deprivation of liberty.22 Greece additionally implemented a “pilot project” on Lesvos Island, whereby newly arrived persons who belong to specific nationalities such as Tunisia, Pakistan, Algeria, Morocco, and Sri Lanka with recognition rates below 25% were immediately placed in “pre-removal” detention until their asylum procedure is concluded. Although the project has ended in January 2018, “low-profile” migrants were conveniently rebranded as “undesirable aliens” with an “economic profile” and still face de facto detention under the same sovereign logic, even before their initial registration.23 24

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe has visited the Greek RIC of Moria in June 2018 and noted that the facility was overcrowded with 7,214 migrants while its capacity accommodates between 2,100 and 3,100 persons only. The containers and tents were in a horrendous condition with little privacy and no protection from weather conditions. The hygiene and sanitation were so poor to the extent that there was one toilet per 70 people, and filthy toilet water has reached the mattresses. Inspectors from Lesvos health directorate have observed limited access to primary healthcare, and have even declared the facility as dangerous for public health. Mental health workers in Moria have reported a surge in mental disorders as they even recall “children as young as ten attempting suicide.” Moria has additionally been a space for violent riots and clashes between its residents, amounting to sexual violence. As a result, the center was described by a BBC report as “the worst refugee camp in the world”. In such environment of insecurity and unpredictability, the migrants reported feeling disciplined on these hotspots whereas such horrendous conditions act as a deterrent.25

Other examples of such de facto detention include some of the hotspots in Italy and Slovenia, and what they have in common with Greece is not only the informal nature of detention upon arrival but also the sovereign rationale operating it. These policies are not a matter of welcome conditional on preventing “unauthorized entry” into the national territory but rather for screening newcomers to establish their nationality, identity, and medical status, as well as to initiate an asylum procedure or a return procedure. In Malta, Marsa RIC has also served a closed center whereby migrants were confined without a detention order, but a 2017 policy shift foresaw a transformation of operation as an open center. In Hungary, the same logic of de facto detention is observed in the transit zones in Röszke and Tompa which border Syria, whereas The Immigration and Asylum Office issues an order végzés for the applicants to reside in the transit

22 Ibid, 15-16.  
23 Ibid, 19.  
zone. As a result of this ruling not constituting a detention order, applicants cannot appeal the decision per se, and are confined in the transit zones. Since asylum seekers go through the regular application procedure in transit zones as of 28th of March 2017, their de facto detention in transit zones does not have a time limit especially after a first instance decision on asylum.26

The biopolitical violence of reception and identification (EURODAC)

The sovereign rationale behind the dynamics of migrant reception and identification is grounded in the “Dublin System”, which allocates asylum determination responsibilities for their processing by single EU Member States as set forth by the “Dublin Procedure”, or Regulation (EU) 604/2013. The enforcement of the Dublin Regulation is facilitated by EURODAC (European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database),27 a biometrics database wherein Member States are obligated to register and share fingerprints of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in order to identify their first point of entry as well as storing information on asylum applicants’ country of origin and gender. The primary aim of the Dublin System is to design a mechanism of collective responsibility and ensure the fair distribution of asylum claims as per Member States reception capacity.28 However the real raison d’être of the Dublin Procedure can be regarded as a tactic of “externalization of migration control” as described by the migration researcher Minos Mouzourakis, which leads to Member States delegating responsibility away from their sovereign realm and thus availing themselves the burden of moral obligations.29 Biometric profiling is therefore a governmental tactic borrowed from police science, serving to exclude irregular migrants as homo sacer from the EU’s official juridico-political structure through including them in the EURODAC system as potential criminals.

In theory, the EU has a common asylum structure, but in practice it has varied widely, making the system best viewed as a “lottery”. Different nationalities are accepted in different proportions within the EU Member States, and the types of assistance vary widely from integration and welfare to tent camps with little support. Unfortunately, multiple EU countries spend much more on surveillance and border protections than on improving their reception conditions. Meanwhile, countries on the “frontline” such as Italy or Greece seem to find little solidarity or support from their wealthier neighbors in the region.

Michel Foucault explained the rise of such biopolitical technologies of governance as a result of the transition from juridico-institutional sovereignty to the approach of “governmentality” in modern states, whereby the population’s health became an ultimate concern for sovereign power through a complex series of institutions, practices, and tactics, utilizing security apparatuses and knowledge production. This new form of bio-power has allowed the sovereign to subjugate biological bodies within politics, attaching it to the people’s own identities.30 In the case of the EU, it is regarded as the sovereign determining its own rules for granting protection and entry, thus producing its own savoir of knowledge on how migrants should be included (or excluded). It also utilizes security techniques such as the EURODAC system to maintain biopolitical control over the migrant population by “camping” them in hotspots under the pretense of humani-

26 Gruša. Crossing a Red Line, 21-22.
27 Established by Regulation (EU) 603/2013
28 Mouzourakis, We Need to Talk about Dublin’ Responsibility under the Dublin System as a blockage to asylum burden-sharing in the European Union, 4-5.
29 Ibid, 9.
tarianism. In this manner, the technological development of EURODAC represents biopower in the way it mediates the connection between asylum politics and biology. This “corporeal” technique of governmentality, which became a tool of migration (population) management, is aimed at violently classifying and policing certain types of bodies such as the migrant body.\textsuperscript{31}

The EURODAC further classifies irregular migrants as per the Dublin III regulation into 3 categories above 14 years old whereby the first is for applicants for international protection (Article 9), the second is for third-country nationals or stateless persons who are irregularly crossing the border (Article 14), and the third is for third-country nationals or stateless persons who are illegally staying in a Member State (article 17). While the data of the persons in the second category is stored for 18 months and then erased, the data of asylum applicants is stored for 10 years. As for the third category, the data is not stored but run through the system for the purposes of “matching” or comparison (quote regulation here).\textsuperscript{32} These categories represent various degrees of illegalization or factors of risk according to specific groups that are placed as belonging to particular milieu, thus assigned by notions of danger for the purpose of preserving social security with little regard to the right of data ownership and hence confidentiality.\textsuperscript{33}

The EURODAC additionally contributes to conflating immigrants and refugees with illegality and criminality, especially when combined with the discourse of “the other”. Through biopolitical technologies such as the EURODAC, the “uninvited bodies” are sorted into different types of life by drawing boundaries between the legitimate and the illegitimate, the useful (skilled migrants schemes) and the undesirable. This monopoly over determining the asylum dynamics according to the rule of exception rather than the law is a mode of “bio-sovereignty” that decides on bare life. Scholar Ajana Bithaj describes the humanitarian rationale that exercises violence in the name of protection as “a humanity that is no longer human”, and concludes that “when it [the state] decides to expand the number of detention centres across the country, when it decides to place asylum seekers under prison-like conditions, it is declaring a form of sovereign exception, or at least, performatively resuscitating ‘a spectral sovereignty within the field of governmentality.’\textsuperscript{34} EURODAC is just one example of how the sovereign is deploying state technologies and information systems to exert biopower, which has profound implications on the embodied existence and living prospects for many migrants. It is biopolitical violence that serves a “function creep” in controlling the migrant body within the wider political order.\textsuperscript{35}

**The EU’s Hotspot Approach and its Burns**

The wide variation of Dublin measures and conditions across EU member states as echoed by Benhabib\textsuperscript{36} has not only led many asylum seekers to destroy their passports,\textsuperscript{37} but to even destroy parts of their bodies and alternatively their record of entry in order to circumvent their EURODAC identification. Specifically, there have been multiple documented cases of individuals mutilating their fingers through placing them on burning hobs or using knives, acid, glue, and razors.

\begin{itemize}
\item[31] Salter. The Global Visa Regime and the Political Technologies of the International Self, 184.
\item[32] UK Visas and Immigration. Dublin III Regulation.
\item[34] Bithaj. Asylum, Identity Management and Biometric Control, 581 – 586.
\item[35] Ibid. 577.
\item[37] Torpey, 257.
\end{itemize}
In 2011, a story emerged on asylum seekers in the Italian Anagnina squat burning their fingertips. One Eritrean refugee called Awet showed his scarred fingertips to The Guardian reporters while his friend explained that he burned them through placing his hands on a burning hob “so he could apply for asylum like a new person.” The migrants in the overcrowded squat further explained how common it is for asylum seekers to burn their fingers in attempt to destroy their record of entry to Italy and beat the Dublin system. They fear that they will be deported back to the first countries of entry such as Greece and Italy, which have worse welfare provision, leaving vulnerable refugees unemployed and homeless.38

Another investigation in 2015 revealed another example of the hotspot burns. A Sudanese refugee from war-torn Darfur has applied for asylum in France after burning his fingers, and was hoping to reach the UK through the English Channel after leaving his first country of asylum. He described his attempt to circumvent Dublin to a Guardian reporter he met in Calais Camp as a very violent process that takes two hours: through burning a metal pipe until it’s red then rubbing the fingers constantly and firmly until they’re mutilated. Despite being recognized as refugees with protection rights under the refugee Convention as well as the right to family unity, they are in state of exception where such basic rights are often not provided.

Why would people commit such violent act against their own bodies? It is a question that the current political rhetoric surrounding migration in Europe cannot answer. EURODAC has tangled the human body in relations of sovereign power and political domination, which can only be useful if it is controlled under a system of subjugation. The EU wants the migrants visible through their bodies; therefore they are becoming clan-destine, refusing the representative politics of citizenship and the corresponding sovereign logic of quantifying, calculating, and using them as a political instrument. After all, biometrics literally means “measurement of life” as a modern policing technology of identifying persons through measuring and processing of their unique biological features such as fingerprints, facial features, and eye retinas.39

Moreover, EURODAC is forcing migrant bodies along with their nationality, race, and gender, to serve as automatic confessionary machines thus acting against the person through “corporeal technology”. The intentions are assumed and documented through the migrants’ fingers and eventually the lines on their fingertips constitute their own borders. Burning the fingertips therefore could be the only way to destroy the relationship between the body and identity politics, as well as claiming back the right not to be securitized, identified, and controlled. As Salter said, the body testifies without the consent or even knowledge of its owner, and little is done to ensure the privacy of the collected corporeal information or tracking its processing. The corporeal lens in this sense exposes the ways in which the body comes to testify about socioeconomic origins, intentions and character. If such confession is not line with the story of the sovereign examiner, the migrants are automatically held as suspects and thus can be exposed to exceptional measures at the borders.40

38 Grant and Domokos. Dublin regulation leaves asylum seekers with their fingers burnt.
39 Bithaj. Asylum, Identity Management and Biometric Control, 581.
Conclusion

Frontline EU Member States have been posing an ethical problem grounded in their sovereign logic to protect the European population. The hotspot approach encourages a precedent in camping migrants through violent biopolitical subjugation, dislocation, and arbitrary assimilation in predatory spaces of exception outside jurisdictional accountability as well as territorial sovereignty in some cases. Reception centers, ironically justified by humanitarian rationale, are inhumane camps whereby de facto detention is being constantly practiced with irregular migrants as the ultimate biopolitical subjects of the EU, setting the violent stage for bare life clashing with biopolitical power. Reception centers qualify as Agambenian camps where a continuum between sovereign politics and biopolitics is observed, and whereby de facto detention of peoples excluded from legal protections keeps evolving into different shapes.

The difficulty to understand why migrants undertake such dangerous journeys in the first place is manifested in the militarized discourse that also distinguishes between refugees as good and “economic migrants” as bad. Nevertheless, a migrant in need of protection is thinking beyond mere survival, like the rest of us, they are faced with the question of how to live a qualified life. This adds future avenues for research on the state of exception and its violent implications as a further proof on how camps are the new nomos of modern states in the West, especially in light of the current EU project of expanding RICs in countries of origin and how that implicates the extra-territorial Western logic of sovereignty and the evolutionary exceptional spaces across the globe. There are many attempts to improve reception conditions for migrants in EU countries, but it can only be realized when the state of exception seizes to exist.

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The Uyghur Ethno-religious Identity
Domestic Diversion in a Post-9/11 Context

By: Ibrahim Abd-El-Barr

Introduction

Recent academic scholars and specialists on ethnic minorities in China and with regard to the Uyghur ethno-religious identity in particular have generally studied their persecution at the hands of the Chinese state within the frameworks of securitization, counter-terrorism, and state terrorism. J. Smith Finley (2019) provides an in-depth study into how a (in)security discourse led by the Chinese state which confines the Uyghur identity within the so-called “three evil forces” (separatism, extremism, and terrorism) has led to the establishment of mass internment camps set up for Uyghur populations in the Xinjiang province since 2014. Finley continues to situate the state’s practice of demographic, linguistic, and religious securitization of the Uyghur identity and all of its accompanying cultural and religious characteristics and features within the framework and definition of state terror proposed by Ruth Blakeley (2012). 1 Adrian Zenz (2019) provides detailed

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empirical evidence for the establishment of internment camps or “re-education” facilities in Xinjiang since 2016 by listing official government bids for these facilities and exploring the history of re-education and social reengineering in Communist China. Others like Dibyesh Anand (2019) have focused on the colonization aspect of China’s securitization of its ethno-national peoples, primarily Uyghurs and Tibetans, arguing that the lens or form of colonization that captures these statist projects is neither one of post-colonial nation building nor internal colonialism but rather modern Chinese colonialism similar to that imposed by European powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only a few, however, have presented the heavy militarization and securitization of the Uyghur ethno-religious identity as an instrumental tool for achieving the double-effect of serving specific political and economic interests of political and military elites as well as divert the greater Chinese public from political or economic setbacks or regressions by designating the Uyghurs as scapegoats or an out-group threatening Chinese nationalism and prosperity. Kilic Bugra Kanat (2012) provides a qualitative study in support of the domestic diversionary theory by making the case that the Uyghurs have been formulated as an out-group in the in-group-out/out-group dichotomy created by the state in the context of its post-2001 “war on terror”. He argues that only two weeks prior to the attacks on September 11 the Secretary of the Communist Party in the Xinjiang region had declared that separatism and religious extremism were never a threat in the region, however immediately after the attacks the rhetoric transformed completely towards emphasizing and amplifying the threats of all three (separatism, extremism, and terrorism) with regard to Uyghur national groups and the Uyghur population in general. This paper intends to complement this latest study however providing a more recent account for Uyghur domestic diversionary repression than the post 2002-2012 timeframe Kanat’s study is concerned with as well as explore political and economic contexts that their instrumental targeting is situated or framed within beyond the Global War on Terror including the Belt and Road developmental initiative and in respect to transitional conflicts in the post-2011 period.

Conceptual Framework

Expanding on the orthodox or original form of diversionary war theory, Tir and Jasinski (2008) contribute to the empirical evidence for this theory as well as place the cornerstones for the addition of the domestic diversionary option by arguing that political leaders are faced with a more viable and easily accessible option than targeting foreign states for diversionary purposes. By directing attention in-wards towards ethnic or religious minorities or out-groups political leaders or elites struggling to overcome political and/or economic crises and sources of reduced legitimacy and popularity may achieve the “rally-round-the-flag” effect without facing the repercussions of indulging into full-fledged warfare with a foreign state with equal or even less military capacities. Moreover, states may find themselves in a position inclined towards

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transferring diversionary tactics from their outwards foreign policies inwardly towards domestic policies in conjunction with or parallel to changes or transformations in local and international contexts and discourses. With regard to China in particular, former propaganda directed towards the US and Japan during the 1990s utilized to stir nationalistic support for the government was later transformed into shifting the focus towards disparate ethnic and religious minorities, primarily Uighurs and Tibetans, with the rise of the discourse surrounding the threats of global terrorism and the backlash of the former foreign-directed propaganda as a diversionary tactic. Nevertheless, despite empirical support for the domestic diversionary theory, some scholars like Machain, Carla, and Rosenberg (2018) and Klein and Tokdemir (2019) have criticized the linearity of the theory arguing that there are more dynamics at play than merely political leaders’ political and economic incentives including the targeted minorities’ or out-groups’ mobilization capabilities and their strategic behavior. Klein and Tokdemir (2019) argue that conceptualizing the instrumental use of political force against a domestic group as a scale rather than a binary decision provides greater insight into how the combination of diversionary incentives and out-group capabilities influence political leaders’ strategic cost-benefit calculation for the use of force against a domestic minority. Their results support the hypothesis that the degree of diversionary force applied to domestic out-groups varies accordingly to the out-group’s mobilization capabilities. Leaders refrain from using excessive political force against an out-group with lower levels of political and military mobilization capacities as to not create a negative backlash or create avenues for the creation of out-right civil war or strife, while reserving direct military diversionary action for militant or militarily-capable out-groups. This is in accordance to the calculated effect of stirring nationalistic support for an already perceived threat or initial level of public cohesion as described by early contributions to the in-group/out-group dichotomy proposed by Coser (1956), Simmel, Levy (1988), and others. Highlighting through their empirical results a combination between a target’s mobilization capability profile, levels of legitimacy, and the diversionary military action’s level of risk, Klein and Tokdemir (2019) suggest further research should be made with regard to studying additional factors that disrupt the sometimes assumed causal, straightforward path between economic or political incentives and domestic diversionary political force.

Anti-foreign nationalism as a diversionary tactic

With regard to the focus of this paper, the role of domestic struggles between the state and ethnic minorities in shaping China’s foreign policies can be described as being generally overlooked in the scholarship surrounding China’s international relations. Rather, the neo-realist paradigms dominating the field have concentrated on the impacts of structural factors on the relations between China as a rising power in the international arena and other great powers like the US. Only recently has the interna-
tionalization of China’s ethnic minority issues shed light on the influence of China’s domestic policies towards minorities like the Uyghurs and Tibetans on its foreign policies and positions. With regard to China’s domestic policies towards the Uyghur ethno-nationalist or separatist identity in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), Michael Clarke (2017) makes the case that an interplay of five major factors determines the impact of any one ethnic minority on China’s foreign policy: “the historical relationship between the ethnic group and the Chinese state; the geographic concentration of an ethnic minority; the degree of acculturation to the dominant Han society; external great power support; and mobilized diasporas.” In addition to these five major factors, the global impact the events of September 11, 2001 had on states’ foreign and domestic policies in general, and precisely with regard to China and its international support for the “Global War on Terror”, serves as a crucial turning point in terms of China’s reflection of its domestic policies on its foreign policies, particularly in relation to the Uyghur minority. Shortly after the events of 9/11, the Chinese state was fervent to frame its struggle with Uyghur separatism and ethno-religious nationalism within the framework of its own war on terror, extremism, and separatism, despite ironically having cleared XUAR’s name of the threat of terrorism or extremism only two weeks prior to the attacks.

The arise of the Chinese state’s rhetoric surrounding the Uyghur ethno-religious, nationalist, and separatist identity as equating to terrorism and thus forming a national threat immediately after the events of September 11 seems to coincide with the decay of the anti-foreign type of Chinese nationalism pushed forth by the state during the early 1990s. Directing attention and public dismay towards foreign or external forces provided the ideal “scapegoat” for China’s domestic economic and social conflicts during the time where nationalistic support was sought as a way for the Chinese state to regain its legitimacy and acceptance in the eyes of its majority Han population. This form of anti-foreign nationalism, however, was not one that was completely forged or artificially produced but rather resonated well with the majority Chinese population’s initial levels of cohesion and pre-existing notions of a shared historical narrative that foreign forces, primarily Japan and later the US, attempted the humiliation of China throughout its history. Moreover, this form of state-induced or top-down nationalism directed outwards towards foreign states accusing them of attempting to create instability by meddling in Chinese domestic affairs and even their attempts of territorial dissolution served as a diversionary tactic at a time when direct blows were made to the Chinese state’s legitimacy and its ability to maintain social stability and produce economic development following the downfall of communism in the Soviet Union and surrounding states. Even more so, the Chinese government itself and its communist ideology faced direct criticism from its majority public whether in the form of mass protests against the government or social and economic instability resulting from events such as the Tiananmen Square incident in July of 1989, requiring the state and precisely the

12 Ibid., 3.
14 Ibid., 511.
CCP and its leaders to direct attention away from challenges to its legitimacy and towards an instrumental rhetoric that would involve scapegoating the West and Japan for its unresolved domestic crises. Through the launch of initiatives such as the Patriotic Education campaigns in the early 1990s supported and dispersed by state-controlled media, agencies, and enterprises the Chinese state was not only successful in promoting a common sense of nationalism that directed criticism and dissent towards foreign states and entities but also through the creation of the exaggerated threat of territorial fragmentation of regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang, the state was also zealous in drawing attention towards its ethnic and religious minorities with separatist or sub-national inclinations. Despite so, these domestic minority groups were not yet presented as threats to Chinese national unity or instrumentally utilized as diversionary targets but rather the dominating rhetoric produced by the state during this period revolved around anti-foreign nationalism and rallying the Chinese mass public around the flags of Chinese nationalism with the tendency to present itself as victims of outside schemes and attempts of constant humiliation at the international level.

**Inverting diversion in-wards**

The Chinese state’s reliance on the instrumental use of the top-down nationalism it stood firmly behind throughout the early and mid-1990s for diverting attention away from its domestic political, social, and economic regressions began to decline as it gave birth to a seemingly aware and informed generation of nationalists that were unsatisfied with China’s performance at both the regional and international levels. Naturally, China’s intensified integration into the international political and economic realms also meant that national attention would be directed towards its foreign policies and whether or not the Chinese government was indeed protecting national interests or elite political and economic interests were at stake. Events such as the clashing of a Chinese jet with the EP 3 surveillance plane on Hainan Island in 2001 created a surge of protests and national criticism of the Chinese government’s response which was viewed as being “soft” or apologetic. The form of anti-foreign nationalism that had emerged in the early 1990s which served as an instrumental and diversionary tactic to divert and diffuse attention and criticism away from the CCP’s domestic policies would now come in direct confrontation with its rise to political and economic stardom at the international level negatively influencing US-China relations, economic interests with Japan, and its overall integration into the international system. Described by Zhao (2005) as pragmatic nationalism, the age of exploiting anti-foreign or more precisely anti-Western nationalism as a source for CCP legitimacy and maintaining national unity and loyalty had become a thing of the past by the late 1990s and in the wake of the new millennium. Faced with the repercussions of promoting a “double-edged sword” type of nationalism that directed attention externally for internal disputes, the Chinese state required an alternative diversionary target that would continue on the same path of rallying

19 Ibid., 514.
the masses around the flag and maintaining its legitimacy and popularity among China’s Han majority while simultaneously not affecting its growing integration into the international system and its relations with foreign and especially western powers.

In the wake of the attacks on September 11, 2001 the Chinese state did not hesitate in joining the “global war on terror”, as described by the US, as well as declare its own domestic war on terror by launching the "strike-hard campaigns" in the Xinjiang region.21 Fostering a history of separatist and Uyghur nationalist-independence movements such as the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” (ETIM), the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) and the “Uyghur Liberation Organization” (ULO) the Chinese state’s discourse surrounding these organizations and others evolved from one revolving around eliminating potential political and social opposition and voices of dissent to one directly affiliating and connecting these movements to the wider global terrorist context represented in Al-Qaida and other extremist groups.22 In an official report released by the Chinese government in 2002 the above organizations were held responsible for “over 200 terrorist incidents” since 1990, which, according to the report, resulted in the deaths of 162 individuals and the injury of 440 people.23 Not only do these claims contradict earlier statements made by then Secretary of the Communist Party in the Xinjiang region, Wang Lequan, two weeks prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks assuring that the region had never been subject to separatist and religious extremism, but contradictions within the above mentioned report itself suggest the instrumental use of the global context of the war on terror to transform local discourses surrounding ethno-nationalist separatism or independence into a discourse involving national security and social stability within China.24 James Millward (2004) demonstrates the inconsistencies in the Chinese government’s accounts of violence in the region in his critical assessment of violent separatism in Xinjiang.25 These inconsistencies in the figures produced by the state not only suggest a dramatic transformation in the state-produced rhetoric and discourse surrounding the Uyghur ethno-religious nationalist identity equating to separatism, terrorism and extremism but more critically suggests manipulative and calculated tactics on the part of the state to situate past independent incidents of violence in Xinjiang and any future claims or attempts for autonomy in the region within the context of global terrorism and thus serve as a diversionary device in transforming the earlier described anti-foreign nationalism into a form of anti-minority nationalism. Producing and expanding its list and definition of terrorism and terrorist groups to include not only previously known movements and organizations such as the ETIM and ETLO but also peaceful advocacy and human rights organizations situated in Germany, Turkey and even the US (e.g. World Uyghur Congress) the Chinese state was instrumental in its use of the global war on terrorism and its own exaggerated domestic struggle with local “terrorist

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groups” to regain legitimacy and national support which had been compromised by anti-foreign nationalism that was no longer beneficial to the state’s political and economic interests but rather on the contrary proving to be detrimental to its integration into the international political and economic systems.26 The scapegoats or “others” would no longer be confined to foreign powers such as the US and Japan that were previously described as engaging in a long history of “humiliating” and “undermining” China and its regional and international positions, but rather directed towards an internal “other” in the form of an ethnic minority with disparate cultural, linguistic, and religious characteristics that formulated them as a “suspect community” in opposition to and threatening the “imagined community” consisting of the majority Han population in China.27

**Ethnic Instrumentalism vs. Primordialism, Constructivism**

Despite the Uyghur ethno-religious identity fulfilling the rubric or requirements of a “suspect community” in terms of its cultural, linguistic, religious, and even economic disparities with the majority Chinese “imagined community” the arguments presented in this paper are in line with the ethnic instrumentalist framework of domestic diversionary theory as opposed to other approaches that tend to explain the violence against the Uyghur community in terms of ethnic and religious primordial differences or even those that rely on constructivist explanations to the disparities between the majority Han Chinese identity and the Uyghur identity forming as a gradual process over time. As such, incidents of state initiated violence against this ethnic minority are studied and presented here as serving specific and calculated political and economic motives rather than strictly resulting from deep-seated cultural or religious grievances or the construction of certain identities as being culturally and socially threatening to an “imagined community” and others being benevolent or conducive. Rather, the state presents and situates certain ethnic minority identities within the in-group/out-group dichotomy as a spontaneous response to surrounding political and economic contexts such as the global war on terror presented earlier and development or rather exploitation of natural resources of a certain geopolitical strategic region such as Xinjiang, as it will be demonstrated later. Additionally, the instrumental positioning of certain ethnic and religious minorities such as the Uyghurs within this dichotomy better serves the purpose of diverting the public away from more serious political and economic challenges faced by the state and towards a marginal discourse reformulated as impacting national security and social stability rather than as merely situated within a state securitization conceptual framework.

**War on Terror: discourse for domestic diversion**

Throughout the early and mid-2000s the Chinese state engaged in a multi-faceted campaign including utilizing state-controlled media and propaganda in order to align the in-group/out-group dichotomy discourse revolving around the Uyghur identity with the “war on terror” or the “three evil forces” (fundamentalism, Abd-El-Barr

separatism, and terrorism) discourse. Releasing a series of documentaries and movies that amplified if not exaggerated the threat of extremism and terrorism in the Xinjiang region, the Chinese government sought to not only “awaken” the national threat of terrorism as common in the minds and lives of the dominant Han Chinese public but perhaps more critically to appear in front of foreign states at the regional and international levels that China was also a “victim” of a global extremist ideology. This would instrumentally serve to not only diffuse local anti-foreign nationalism at a time when the state’s socialist ideology had ceased to gain popularity and public acceptance but also utilize the intensification of globalization and the salience of a global discourse of terrorism for its own benefit both domestically and internationally. On one hand, previous scrutiny directed externally towards foreign states in the form of anti-foreign nationalism was now being directed internally towards a domestic threat as China appeared to take on an important role and initiative at the international level in collaboration and cooperation with foreign states and international organizations that many nationalists had been cynical towards in the past. On the other, the Chinese state was able to manipulate and exploit the global war on terrorism for its own advantage by engaging in repressive action against ethnic and religious minorities that were suspected of having transnational affiliations with international terrorist organizations without facing the repercussions of foreign intervention in the name of protecting human rights as these local initiatives were taken in the name of not only protecting China’s own national security but also the security of regional neighbors and even distant western states. Against this backdrop, state-led Chinese security forces engaged in direct diversionary military action against alleged “terrorist” or “extremist” groups in the Xinjiang region including the Pamir Mountains raid in January of 2007 which is described as the largest anti-terrorism raid in China’s modern history. The Chinese state declared that the ETIM had allegedly controlled the terrorist camp that had been infiltrated along with several surrounding ones with direct affiliations and assistance from Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. As such, this direct counter-terrorist military action not only appealed to the majority Han public that China indeed faced a local national threat emerging from the Uyghur-dominant Xinjiang region but also with alleged accusations of having direct ties to the most wanted and notorious man at the time, China was able to execute its domestic agenda of diverting attention towards a domestic minority group accordingly and perhaps in support of major Western powers like the US and its global war or man-hunt of bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. Moreover, state-controlled media coverage of the raid and of subsequent events such as the national funeral of a police officer killed during the raid stirred nationalistic and patriotic feelings among the majority Han public who were now glorifying their own martyrs in China’s own war on terror and directing dissent and animosity towards an entire ethnic and religious minority portrayed as breeding anti-national and extremist ideologies threatening to the unity and stability of the imagined Chinese community.

29 Ibid., 520-521.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
Post-2001 Implications of Domestic Diversion

Although measuring the Chinese government’s success in diverting the Uyghur minority’s attention towards the Uyghur ethnicity in general as a source of social and political unrest is difficult to determine in empirical terms, several consequential incidents and events following the Pamir Mountains raid in 2007 attest for it. For example, during the 2008 Olympic Games set in the country’s capital, Beijing, it was reported that thousands of Uyghur residents were expelled and detained from the city in preparation for the events as well as tens of Uyghur-owned businesses including restaurants and shops shut down.32 Moreover, Uyghur visitors to the country’s capital were denied accommodation and basic services as a result of being publically and socially affiliated with terrorism, extremism, and separatism in the aftermath of the Chinese state’s declaration of its own war on terrorism in the Xinjiang region.33 These incidents strongly suggest that the Chinese government at the time was successful in transforming the discourse surrounding China being a victim of foreign-led attempts of humiliation and degradation to one revolving around being victims of domestic and local security threats spurring from an “internal other”, indiscriminant between actual militant or separatist groups and an entire civilian community residing within its borders. As such, previous anti-foreign nationalist sentiments were now inverted inwards towards a matter of domestic national security providing a source of the state’s legitimacy and public acceptance amongst its majority in-group, the Chinese Han majority. Violence initiated by non-state and state actors against Uyghur communities across China continued throughout the mid and late 2000s where in June 2009 a group of Uyghur workers in the Guangdong province were lynched by Chinese workers and as a result of the government’s practice of impunity and hesitancy to investigate the occurrence sparked episodes of interethnic violence in other cities and provinces including the violence in Urumqi in July of 2009.34 The dispersal of Uyghur-targeted violence in regions other than Xinjiang and its initiation by non-state actors is another indication of the success of the Chinese state to deploy and exploit Han-majority nationalistic sentiments and feelings towards a calculated domestic out-group that would carry the burdens of being the scapegoats or diversionary targets for the state’s quest for legitimacy and public acceptance against the backdrop of its self proclaimed war on terror that it had fell victim to since the beginning of the millennium if not earlier.

Pragmatic and Instrumental Nationalism

Finley (2019) asserts that the CCP witnessed an ideological turn around 2008 where an emphasis was placed on two policies—its initial “leapfrog development” policy through initiatives like the Great Western Development Campaign and “permanent order” which it sought to achieve by enforcing overall political security and demolishing all dissident voices or calls for ethnic or separatist nationalism.35 She also asserts that during this period the CCP faced several domestic challenges including social

32 Ibid., 523.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
unrest as a result of economic transformations, the failure to revive or reconstruct a persuasive state ideology, the loss of ideological orientation, loss of legitimacy, growing corruption, and the intensification of ethnic tensions and clashes in Xinjiang and Tibet, among others.\textsuperscript{36} While these crises were apparent as well as the transformation or “turn” of the state’s ideological policies, it is also argued here that the type of nationalism the state sought to support in order to gain legitimacy was not one necessarily informed by a state ideology but rather one that relies on pragmatism, prudence, and most importantly instrumental exploitation depending on the surrounding social, economic, and political contexts or challenges it faces. Nevertheless, security and development discourses were widespread throughout this period as the state’s explanation for its intensified and penetrative integration programs and campaigns, especially the Great Western Development in Xinjiang, where economic development was used in order to pursue national unity and social stability.\textsuperscript{37} Against the backdrop of the existence of a security threat in Xinjiang, a series of policies were pursued such as encouraging Han in-migration and settlement in Xinjiang to reduce the margin between the Uyghur majority and Han minority in the region; the secularization of religion, language, culture, and education in favor of the Han-majority; and last but not least the political and economic marginalization of the Uyghurs through Han-majority, quasi-military, and state controlled economic development projects which furthered the margin between the Han-majority and the Uyghurs on all levels.\textsuperscript{38} These policies played a significant role in not only intensifying ethnic tensions between the two, but also fed the security discourse surrounding the threat of terrorism in the region as being an eminent one requiring national attention, social and economic development and integration, and of course an imagined Chinese-led “modernization” of the western regions like Xinjiang which were viewed as being primitive or backwards. The state-led policies of economic development, social stability, and national unity in the Xinjiang region in particular took quite a drastic form especially after 2014 as ethnic tensions resulting from these central policies lead to increased violence such as the 2014 Kunming railway station attacks.\textsuperscript{39} From this point on, state policies directed towards economic development were replaced, as confirmed by Finley (2019), by “social stability” along with the previously held policies of “permanent order”.\textsuperscript{40} This “social stability”, however, was to be achieved at any and all costs where the CCP took drastic measures in order to penetrate the grass roots of the Uyghur society against the backdrop of attempting to eliminate extremist ideologies from giving rise to separatism or calls for absolute autonomy.\textsuperscript{41}

Mass Internment

Beginning in 2014, the Chinese state engaged in a systematic form of mass internment disguised under the clothes of “re-education” and fanghuiju (a term used to describe programs that claim to “visit the people, benefit the people, and gather the hearts of the people”).\textsuperscript{42} The foundations, however, of these mass internment camps are based on xenophobic cri-

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 10.  
\textsuperscript{37} Clarke, “China’s internal security dilemma and the “Great Western Development”, (2007): 329.  
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 331-335.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 3.
teria that equate any form of Islamic practice, behavior, appearance and of course teachings with religious extremism and potentially the threat of terrorism and thus produce a ranking list that determine a citizen's trustworthiness.43 Containing criteria such as simply being of Uyghur ethnicity, having religious knowledge or praying five times a day, and possessing a passport and having relatives in a foreign country can lead a citizen in Xinjiang to internment in any one of the hundreds of facilities set up by the state, as confirmed by satellite imagery and official government bids related to these facilities collected by Adrian Zenz (2019).44 It is estimated that as of December 2018, anywhere between 800,000 and 2 million Uyghur as well as other Turkic Muslim minorities were detained in “political re-education” camps in Xinjiang.45 As for living conditions and human rights violations that take place within the walls of these facilities they have been reported to range between over-populated and prison-like conditions; food poisoning; coercive securitization in the form of being forced to eat pork or drink alcohol; forcing inmates to denounce their religion, beliefs, and even God; intense psychological self-criticism and denouncement; physical violence and torture; mass rape and other forms of physical and mental violence and violations.46 While these forms of coercion and repression might not fit the orthodox understanding of diversionary military action they are carried out by state actors including police, security forces and officials and more crucially are conducted based on a calculated strategy that weighs the outcomes, implications, and overall instrumental benefit of these actions. For example, mass internment in itself as well as many of the repressive or coercive acts that take place within these camps are intended to enlist fear in the minds and hearts of Uyghur and Turkic Muslim populations residing outside these “concentration camps” whether in Xinjiang or across the entirety of China. Stories shared by the families and friends of those detained have resulted in what Roberts (2018) describes as “complete compliance” outside of the camps in fear of receiving similar fates as those detained and rarely released.47 Furthermore, the outside atmosphere created by these mass internment camps is one that encourages distrust amongst Uyghur communities, surveillance and even intrusion on the part of state officials, constant fear and anxiety with regard to expressing opinions or being affiliated with any individual or activity leading to internment and other social and psychological implications among the larger Chinese Muslim communities and populations. With that being said, mass internment along with its accompanying internal and external implications is not only a calculated form of coercion that intends to influence a larger crowd or group of people as well as divert public attention towards narratives surrounding terrorism, extremism, and separatism, but also fulfills the definition (along with the other conditions) of state terror proposed by Blakeley (2012).48 Nevertheless, having these coercive acts take place behind the tall walls of highly-surveillance facilities and away from the eyes of the public as well as international

43 Ibid., 4.
44 Zenz, Adrian. “‘Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude’ (2019): 102-128.
48 Blakeley, Roth. “State violence as state terrorism.” The Ashgate research companion to political violence (2012): 63-78.
media who have been denied access and information about them, allows for much of this activity to fall under the narrative of state securitization rather than as a form of diversionary military or coercive action. However, the highly selective nature of these mass internment activities as well as the calculated and intended instrumental implications regarding drawing national attention towards a matter shaped as affecting national security and achieving the “rally around the flag effect” among the state’s majority out-group (Han Chinese) rather than resulting in negative backlashes or public empathy towards the in-group (Uyghurs) is a clear indication of the instrumental and diversionary nature of these actions. Moreover, the fact that these coercive actions are taken against a specific ethnic and religious group that has been formulated as an out-group as opposed to other relevant ethno-religious groups such as Han Muslims or Yunnanese/“Panthay” Muslims is a clear indication that the choice is a calculated one based on criteria that allows for the successful diversionary effect to take place without bearing the repercussions of a response from the out-group itself or a negative backlash or disapproval of the in-group or majority public intended. Certainly, the Uyghur as well as other Turkic Muslims’ political, economic, and military incapacities and mobilization and organizational weaknesses qualify them as an optimal domestic diversionary target along with the geostrategic and demographic characteristics that allow for their targeting to result in the greatest instrumental benefits possible.

**Belt and Road Initiative**

There is a clear consensus among several scholars specializing in China’s securitization initiatives that the central government in Beijing is working relentlessly through its securitization of the Xinjiang province, and via religious securitization in particular, to eliminate any form of political and economic opposition in the face of its Belt and Road Initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not only President Xi Jinping’s most glorified foreign policy achievement but also the CCP’s “project of the century” which it depends on as a major source of legitimacy vis-à-vis economic growth. Furthermore, Xinjiang’s geopolitical position and centrality to the success of this multi-lateral economic and developmental initiative is overlooked. Not only does Xinjiang share borders with seven neighboring Central Asian and East European states including Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Russia, and thus constituting three out of the “six economic corridors” identified as central to the BRI, but is also described by James Millward (2007) as the “Eurasian crossroad” connecting European, Middle Easterners, South Asian, and East Asian civilizations. At the same time, the Uyghur-dominant Xinjiang’s geopolitical position has historically served as a strategic liability for the central Chinese state, which it has sought to transform into a lucrative asset from the 1980s onwards, and aggressively into the new millennium with its rigorous securitization and integration policies. Through exploiting its natural gas and oil resources, the central Chinese government has not only strategized

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the BRI’s and Xinjiang’s geopolitical position’s essentiality as an instrument for domestic economic growth which translates into maintaining legitimacy but also as a foreign policy tool with regard to establishing an economic and political alternative to the US’s hegemony at the regional and international levels.53 Against this backdrop, while Uyghur religious practice has been constantly under surveillance, restriction, incrimination and more crucially formalized under the narrative of combating terrorism and extremism by Beijing and the CCP, purely economic and political motives and interests are at stake beyond maintaining security and stability in the region. The Uyghur identity and the rhetoric of its affiliation with transnational and global terrorism has been instrumental for political leaders of the CCP to continue exploiting the Xinjiang region for further economic development and expansion which is imperative for their political legitimacy and public acceptance amongst its Han-majority. Moreover, the failure of these developmental initiatives to equally and unequivocally involve the local Uyghur population but rather prioritize Han-migration and coercive integration at the expense of assimilating minority groups like the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims has created further dissent and dissatisfaction from these marginalized groups which is then processed and utilized to further feed the narrative of protecting national security and unity against the threats of terrorism and extremism.54 This vicious cycle is then instrumentally exploited as the basis for further coercion and repressive diversionary action against the Uyghur minority in order to secure the state’s legitimacy on one hand while distancing itself from direct domestic criticism and regional and international intervention on the other. This is achieved through the means of exporting the narrative of the state protecting its own national sovereignty, political legitimacy, its economic interests as well as protecting its strategic partnerships with regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and neighboring states cooperating through “statist multilateralism” to eradicate “transnational security threats” challenging large scale multinational development projects like the BRI as well as domestic agendas like the Great Western Development (GWD) campaign.55

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to compliment some of the understudied qualitative scholarship involved with the ethnic instrumentalist domestic diversionary theory and its application to the case study of the Uyghur ethnic minority in China. Moving beyond the primordialist and constructivist explanations found in other scholarship which confine the state’s repression of this minority to discourses surrounding securitization and counter-terrorism as state terror, the focus of this paper was to highlight the instrumental political and economic underpinnings that drive political elite to engage in a cost-benefit calculation of the benefits and risks of engaging in domestic coercion or violence against a strategically-targeted out-group marginalized to carry the burden of diminishing political and economic conditions or contexts. Moreover, this paper has transcended the immediate post-9/11 period and the discourse of global terrorism as the defining political context or background against which domestic diversionary action is pursued to include other po-
political and economic contexts that trigger the need for a domestic diversionary option to serve as a “scapegoat” within the in-group/out-group dichotomy. Highlighting the selective and economically-driven motives behind the establishment of mass internment camps since 2014 and the instrumental use of the Uyghur identity for coercive and repressive infiltration and securitization of the Xinjiang province for the Belt and Road development initiative, it is argued that directing or diverting public attention towards domestic out-groups has replenished previously diminished sources of legitimacy of the state including anti-foreign nationalism and China’s victimization with regard to global political and economic discourses. Although the domestic diversionary option is theorized to be a more viable and less risky choice than engaging in an international or regional conflict with a foreign state, further research is required in order to measure the actual success of rallying the masses around the flag by targeting a domestic group as well as the implications of domestic groups’ strategic behavior and mobilization capacities on political leaders’ calculated choice of a selective out-group. For now, however, and with regard to state repression and coercive action against the Uyghur minority in particular, academic scholarship, policy recommendations, and international responses must break away from the chains of explaining the violence in terms of state securitization and domestic interethnic conflict to acknowledge and condemn the instrumental use of force for political and economic gains if any practical solution for the Uyghur conundrum is to be sought in the near future.

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A Benign Force
The (Un)making of British State Identity
By: Jonathan Hearn

Introduction

On 25th February 2019 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) “ruled unlawful the United Kingdom’s continued administration of the Chagos Archipelago.”¹ This collection of islands had been overseen as a dependency of the British colony of Mauritius until its detachment in 1965 under a Lancaster House Agreement, at which point it became part of the British Indian Ocean Territory. In the years following the Agreement, the UK resolved to depopulate the islands by increasingly coercive means. Travel was restricted, opportunities for employment were limited, and by 1973 the remaining inhabitants were transported to Mauritius and Seychelles.²

In its ruling, the ICJ concluded that “the decolonization of Mauritius had not been completed in accordance with international law.”³ In response, the UK government reaffirmed

³ Amman, “Legal Consequences,” 784.
its sovereignty of the archipelago and refused to recognise the judgment of the ICJ as binding. Speaking in the House of Commons, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, Sir Alan Duncan, stated that “the defence facilities in the British Indian Ocean Territory help to keep people in Britain and around the world safe.” There was little surprise, then, when the 22nd November 2019 deadline, set by the United Nations (UN) general assembly for the cessation of UK administration of the Chagos Islands, was also defied. Speaking to the BBC in December 2019, Pravind Jugnauth, the Prime Minister of Mauritius, warned “that he was exploring the possibility of bringing charges of crimes against humanity against British officials at the International Criminal Court.”

This remarkable episode between the United Kingdom, one of its former colonies, and the ICJ poses important challenges to the UK’s self-identity. The refusal to acknowledge the advisory opinion of the ICJ and the rejection of the UN’s deadline appears to contradict the liberal democratic values it has championed throughout the world. Despite its founding role in these international institutions, the UK’s willingness to contravene the rule of international law undermines notions of the constructive role it plays in the international community. Is the case of the Chagos Archipelago a unique example of UK political policy being overridden by non-liberal values? Or, do the UK’s actions towards a former colony reveal its commitment to alternative ideals?

This article will argue that the UK’s identity as a state founded upon and driven by liberal principles has crumbled in the pursuit of a neoliberal political rationality. The necessity of applying spatio-temporal fixes to the capitalist problem of overaccumulation has led to political courses of action which flatly contradict the UK’s liberal values, as in the case of the Chagos Islands. These contradictions can only be understood by looking to Britain’s imperial past. Expansionism was at the heart of the formation of the British state and has been a guiding principle of British politics, in different guises, ever since. Reluctance to address this squarely has resulted in the crisis of British state identity witnessed today. In order to demonstrate this thesis, the article will be organised in the following way.

Beginning with a description of how British state identity developed from its distinctly colonial and imperial history, it will be shown that the UK played a leading role in establishing the major international institutions of liberal democracy from its privileged position as a world power. However, in the wake of losing its empire, Britain was led into a deepening commitment to neoliberal economic practices which in turn has led to a crisis of British state identity. Following this, an analysis of the UK’s relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will highlight the specific nature of this identity crisis. Finally, the broader implications of pursuing a neoliberal political rationality will be revealed through a discussion of the British state’s role in the war in Yemen, where Britain’s allies have faced accusations of contravening humanitarian law.

A Liberal Imperial Imperative

For many years, the commanding narrative of the history and formation of the British state was isolated from the discussion surrounding the developments of the British empire. The

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1783 Peace of Paris, which brought the American Revolutionary War to a close, was viewed as a turning point for the British colonial project, marking a separation between an empire of trade in the British Atlantic and one of conquest in the East. The former had been founded upon British supremacy on the high seas, and was bound to the belief that a maritime empire would not fall prey to the “overextension and military dictatorship” which had resulted in the ruin of the Roman Empire and, latterly, that of Spain. In the popular imagination it was an empire of liberty and, as such, markedly different from the later British Empire which was established through violent expansionism and territorial gains in many parts of Asia and Africa. This distinction between two different types of empire removed any notion of imperialism from the origins of British state identity which situated itself more easily with the maritime narrative of the empire of trade. According to this assessment Britain was an island nation and it was almost inevitable, therefore, that she should master the waves. Imperialism, on the other hand, had less to do with Britishness.

However, as David Armitage has persuasively argued, British imperialism, of the variety witnessed in India, had already left its mark on territories closer to home. In fact, the ideology of empire building had been inextricably linked to the practice of state formation which played out between England, Scotland, and Ireland between 1542 – 1612. The English and Scottish monarchies both made use of the language of empire and colony handed down from antiquity by the Romans, and English claims of power over Scotland and Ireland were viewed as having historical precedence. The legendary figure of Brutus, whose myth first appeared in a ninth century historical compilation entitled Historia Brittonum, was said to have reigned over Britain as its first king which, after his death, was divided into three kingdoms and bestowed upon his three sons. The eldest had ruled England and his seniority ensured Scotland and Ireland paid due homage. In the sixteenth century, the uniting of these composite monarchies also involved the civilising of the British Isles’ periphery and the establishing of plantations in Ireland, all of which was predicated on the belief that a British empire had a naturally defined territory, demarcated by the limits of the islands themselves, which could justifiably be rendered British. An expansionist imperative, then, lay at the heart of Britain’s self-identity.

In the late eighteenth century, as the British empire began to encompass ever more of the globe, a series of interdependencies were created between Britain and the territories which had come under her dominion. These connections laid the groundwork for a renegotiation of British identity. As the empire expanded to include a diversity of peoples, languages, and cultures, the idea of Britain was confronted with a crisis of dislocation. The national ‘here’ was confronted with an imperial ‘there’ and the need to reconcile the two became more apparent. In colonizing great swathes of the world, Britain was opening itself up to transformation as the empire’s frontiers returned to the metropole. This return resulted in a confrontation between Britain’s self-identity, as founded upon its domestic history, and an Imperial vision which was fraught with the horrors of colonialism. No longer could Britain’s imperial history be divorced from her domestic one. As Britain colonized with ever greater enthusiasm, Britain itself was

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7 Ibid., 3.
8 Ibid., 100.
9 Armitage, Ideological Origins, 24-60.
colonized. Since then, Britain’s actions on the world stage have been hounded by this unsettling paradox of identity. British identity forged in the expansionist drive which brought about the British state came to be challenged by the results which the expansion produced.

Liberal democracy, then, which took shape in nineteenth century Britain, was forged in the ambiguous space established by the empire. Indeed, many of liberalism’s leading thinkers were also proponents of the imperial venture.\footnote{Jennifer Pitts, A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.} Whilst it would be amiss to assert that liberalism necessitates imperialism, nevertheless, British liberal democratic values grew out of engagement with the politics of empire.\footnote{Ibid., 5.} Britain’s expansive empire provided the perfect space for the implementation of such values which found “institutional expression in Parliament, the law, property and rights.”\footnote{Armitage, Ideological Origins, 8.} The export of liberal ideas was part of a progressive universalism informed, as many saw it at the time, by Britain’s position at the pinnacle of civilisation. This developed into what can be termed liberal internationalism, “an ideology focused on encouraging progress, sowing order and enacting justice in international affairs.”\footnote{Casper Sylvest, British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930: Making Progress? (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 3.} Progress, order, and justice required implementation and the modern British state played a crucial role in the founding of many international institutions, such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice.

The result of such an ideology was that Britain began to see itself as “a benign force for good.”\footnote{David Wearing, “Militarism or Internationalism? British Foreign Policy at a Crossroads,” Soundings 62 (Spring 2016): 122. doi:10.3898/136266216818497712.}\footnote{Sir Eyre Crowe, “Memorandum on the present state of British relations with France and Germany,” 1 January 1907, quoted in Jamie Gaskarth, “Strategizing Britain’s Role in the World,” International Affairs 90, 3 (2014): 571.} The role played by Britain as a founder of democratic institutions strengthened this perception and increasingly fed into the idea of her role as a protector or overseer of international relations. As Sir Eyre Crowe stated in 1907, “England, more than any other non-insular Power, has a direct and positive interest in the maintenance of the independence of nations.”\footnote{HC Deb 2 December 2015 vol cc483-86, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cm翰and/cm151202/debtext/151202-0005.htm#1512031001687} Britain’s expansionism was, then, something to be lauded. Moreover, it could be said that the extended influence produced by Britain’s colonial ventures had become a necessary and vital factor in the creation of a more just and secure world. This interventionist approach has been a key policy of British governments for the past twenty years. Tony Blair sought to frame greater involvement in conflicts at the international level through a discourse of liberal humanitarianism which could increase international security through the spread of liberal values.\footnote{Tony Blair, “Doctrine of the International Community,” speech given to The Economic Club of Chicago, April 22 (1999), https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/19990902094809/http://www.fco.gov.uk:80/news/speechtext.asp?2316.} This vision of liberal interventionism was also expressed in a widely heralded speech in the House of Commons by Hilary Benn, acting as the Shadow Foreign Secretary, in the 2015 vote on action against the Islamic State. In siding with the government and urging for intervention, Benn reminded Members of Parliament of his own party’s role in the founding of the United Nations, and, addressing the Commons, said “[Islamic State] hold us in contempt. They hold our values in contempt. They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our democracy—the means by which we will make our decision tonight—in contempt.”\footnote{HC Deb 2 December 2015 vol cc483-86, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cm翰and/cm151202/debtext/151202-0005.htm#1512031001687} That a commitment to international institutions remains one of the key lenses
through which the British state views itself is clear from Benn’s remarks. One final example comes from the most recent Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) annual report. The report includes numerous statements about the UK’s commitment to international institutions. In his foreword to the 2018-2019 report, the then Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, wrote, that the “overarching aim” of the FCO “is to preserve the international rules and institutions that were, in large measure, the joint creation of Britain and America after the Second World War.”19 Elsewhere in the report, it is stated that one of its greatest priorities is “championing democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”20

Each of these examples combines to reveal a vision of Britain’s self-identity which is founded upon it’s standing as a pillar of the international community and upholder of liberal values such as law, rights, and democracy. However, UK’s ability to project such a narrative stems from its past as a major imperial power, which was also an important factor in the development of the state’s liberal internationalist identity. This identity was formed in the crucible of imperialist expansion and whilst for a long time this aspect of Britain’s history was often removed from discussion of state formation, it has been shown that such a disconnection is untenable. Rather, it appears as though the British state has a number of competing interests, not all of which can assume the highest priority. It will be seen that an increasingly committed stance toward a neoliberal market rationality has set in motion the type of identity crisis revealed in the case of the Chagos Islands dispute, which has called into question Britain’s so-called aim to uphold international rules and institutions. The turn towards a neoliberal economic policy will be framed by a brief appraisal of the conditions which heralded its arrival, namely the attempt to consolidate British capital in the post war years and the effects of decolonisation.

The Neoliberal Turn

In the years following the First World War, British dominance of the global economic order was diminished.21 The years of war had drained the UK’s ability to sustain and uphold its expansive empire and the disruption of the international economy had enabled its main competitor, the United States, to temper British power. However, the City of London continued to occupy an important position and subsequently acted in order to maintain or develop its financial influence. Even before the introduction of explicitly neoliberal policies, the overriding purpose of British policy at this time was to seek the advantage of British capital. It became clear, as the demand for independence from the imperial frontiers grew, that greater engagement with the world at large would be more beneficial than maintaining the remnants of empire.22 Whilst there were some attempts to restore British financial power through strengthening of the Sterling Area, it became clear, by the 1950’s, that the Commonwealth could not provide a sufficient basis for economic growth.23

As the process of decolonisation plied its course, successive governments maintained high levels of public expenditure in an effort to waylay the financial downturn the loss of empire caused. This paved the way for the free market policies of Thatcherism, which began to be implemented upon the Conservative Party’s


22 Ibid., 619-20.
23 Ibid., 637.
election to government in 1979. These policies were not unique to Thatcher, similar ideas had predated her rise to power, but the extent to which they were implemented certainly was. By 1997, and the end of the Thatcher and Major governments, “fully half of the state’s assets in industry had been sold.” These policies concentrated on deregulation and privatisation and continued to be implemented by New Labour, which swept into office in 1997.

Britain’s move toward a neoliberal political rationality, then, was in part precipitated by the loss of empire. However, whilst maintaining British capital had preoccupied much of the state’s political action in the preceding century, the neoliberal free market policies of the 1970’s onwards represented the novel integration of liberal democratic institutions and the capitalist economy. In applying Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality to neoliberal economic policy, Wendy Brown has argued that market rationality can be understood in terms of its attempts to develop, disseminate, and institutionalise itself by utilising state functions. Liberal democratic values are, thus, eroded as the state is bent to the will of the market, responding to its needs and animated by its rationality, with the result that the state’s own legitimacy is configured in purely economic terms. The neoliberal political rationality represents the integration of liberal democratic institutions and the capitalist economy. Liberal democratic values, and the institutions they underpin, are eroded by this conflation, which leads to instances of liberal democrat states acting in highly illiberal or undemocratic ways. The tendency for neoliberalist thinking to confuse political action has also been noted by David Harvey. Commenting on the US attempt to “gain better control of Iraqi and Venezuelan oil supplies,” he highlights the apparent contradiction in the way this was done: “in the former case by purportedly seeking to establish democracy and in the latter by overthrowing it.”

In summary, neoliberal political rationality mobilises the rhetoric of liberal democracy even as it seeks to subsume it. As a result, liberal democratic states appear to act in highly illiberal or undemocratic ways. The UK’s response to the Chagos Archipelago dispute suggests just such an instance; simultaneously declaring itself a champion of democracy and refusing the ICJ judgment to relinquish the administration of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius. Yet this case is not an isolated event. By considering the relationship Britain maintains with Saudi Arabia it will be seen that British political actions on the global stage appear to have little to do with upholding international law. For states such as Mauritius and, in view of Britain’s dealings with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, this has had severe repercussions.

The Gulf in Capitalist Perspective

The UK’s relationships with the Gulf Arab monarchies, in particular Saudi Arabia, form some of the most important connections for the British state in the modern world. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the UK has maintained a strong interest in the region and played an important role in its incorporation into the capitalist system. As such the UK

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25 Ibid., 122.
28 Ibid., 41-2.
has benefitted from the finance capital production of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states, which, since the 1970’s has helped the UK to manage its current account deficit. This reflects the dependent relationship produced between a capitalist centre and the emerging capitalist periphery it creates as a fix for crises of overaccumulation. These fixes fall into two main categories. Firstly, there exists a temporal fix through long-term investment, which has the effect of slowing down growth. Secondly, there is a spatial fix through the expansion of markets. Importantly, as mentioned above, these ‘fixes’ have the effect of joining capitalist states to new centres of accumulation over an extended period of time.

In the case of the UK and Saudi Arabia a major component of this interdependent relationship is the sale of arms. Whilst the United States significantly outperforms its competitors in terms of market share, the UK eclipsed US sales to Saudi Arabia during the period 2009-2013. However, decreasing arms sales in the rest of the world has meant that the UK is ever more reliant on Saudi business.

The close ties enjoyed by the UK with Saudi Arabia over the past 50 years certainly raises doubts concerning its commitment to liberal democratic principles. In contrast to its policy posture towards Saudi Arabia, the UK has had no qualms in intervening to halt other repressive regimes in the region. The difference of approach only serves to highlight the level of interdependence between the two capitalist states. As David Harvey has argued, the “spatio-temporal fixes” employed by neoliberal capitalist states create secondary capitalist centres which, over time, must also resort to extraterritorial fixes. The translation of neoliberal policies from economic powers, such as the UK, to states like Saudi Arabia has carried with it the inherently imperialistic bent of capitalism. Seen in this light Saudi Arabia’s increasingly interventionist approach to political affairs in the gulf, and especially its leading role in the destruction of Yemen, appears to display the uncomfortably familiar air of imperialist venture. Not only has Saudi Arabia destroyed much of Yemen’s means of capital production, it has bought-up many state assets as well. This has all taken place during a period in which Saudi Arabi has been in the grip of an acute financial crisis, recently selling the state-owned oil company Saudi Aramco as a result. It may be argued, then, that the war in Yemen is part of a “spatio-temporal fix” for Saudi Arabia’s liquidity issues, continuing capitalism’s predilection for leaving behind “a trail of devastation.”

But what of Britain’s role in this conflict? Before examining the nature of Britain’s involvement with Saudi Arabia in connection to the war in Yemen, the background to the conflict will first be described along with information pertaining to the damage inflicted upon the county and its inhabitants.

Guilt by Association

In 2011, following the political uprisings which swept across the Arab world, Yemen staged its own peaceful protests against the standing government. This opposition movement

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31 Ibid., 92-3.
33 Wearing, AngloArabia, 159-62.
35 Blumi, Destroying Yemen, 4.
was composed of groups united across political affiliations. Following the resignation of the Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, his Vice-President, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, was installed as head of a transitional government, which excluded many of those involved in the protest movement. However, the Mansour Hadi government oversaw a deterioration in the country’s economy which resulted in food insecurity, lack of electricity, and poor delivery of services. The severe dissatisfaction produced by exclusion from the political process and the worsening economic situation precipitated the initial Houthi attack on Sana’a in 2014, which descended into a conflict involving a number of parties both domestic and regional. In 2015 a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and including the United Arab Emirates launched an offensive against the Houthi which has received operational support from the United States and the United Kingdom.

The ongoing situation in Yemen has had a severe impact on its people. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) issued a press release on the 31st October 2019 reporting that more than 100,000 people had died in Yemen as a result of direct attacks. Of this figure, 12,000 were said to be civilians. However, it is estimated that the total number of deaths, including indirect causes such as starvation or disease, could reach around 230,000 in 2020. The significant human cost of the war has been coupled with the destruction of Yemeni infrastructure and means of capital production. The extent of the damage, which has crippled Yemen’s economy and denied people access to basic resources, has led to a significant mobility event. Around 3.6 million people have been internally displaced, and many others are attempting to migrate beyond Yemen’s borders.

At the outset of the coalition intervention in Yemen in 2015 the UK was quick to pledge support for its ally, Saudi Arabia, the lead country in the coalition. This support took a number of different forms. Between March 2015 and June 2017, the British government approved £4.6 billion worth of military export licences for Saudi Arabia. These vast sums were largely paying for the export of military aircraft which were required for Saudi Arabia’s bombardment of Yemen. Furthermore, the UK has provided “technical support, precision-guided weapons and [exchanged] information with the Saudi Arabian armed forces through pre-existing arrangements.” Despite evidence that Coalition bombardment has frequently targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure, and despite British officials recognising the clear risk of contravening international humanitarian law, the UK has continued to resource Saudi Arabia.

Britain’s involvement in the war in Yemen, whilst being somewhat indirect, nevertheless leaves it open to accusations of complicity in

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40 Clausen, “Understanding the Crisis,” 16.
44 Wearing, AngloArabia, 207.
45 Ibid.
47 ACLED, “Yemen War.”
the destruction of the country and suffering of its people. Rather than displaying the credentials of a liberal humanitarianism, the alliance with Saudi Arabia has revealed that the identity of the British state is linked more closely to its imperial past than many may wish. It was only in 1967 that Britain finally withdrew from Aden in the south of Yemen, which had acted as a key port for the Empire’s ships enroute to India. Britain’s commitment to neoliberal economic practices which united capitalism with democratic institutions has led, in many ways, to the renewed drive for expansion, albeit indirectly through the markets. The case of Yemen shows that Britain’s identity as a liberal democratic state and champion of human rights runs only so deep.

**Conclusion: Time to Brexit?**

That Britain has shown little concern in being associated with a coalition accused of breaking humanitarian law highlights the influence of a neoliberal political rationality in the UK’s relationship with Saudi Arabia and challenges the assumptions of Britain’s liberal democratic identity. In Yemen, as in the case of the Chagos Islands, liberal democratic values have buckled under the pressure of a market rationality. In a postcolonial world (although not post enough according to the ICJ) states, which once suffered at the hands of the British empire, continue to be subjected to imperialist modes of political action. The translation of neoliberal capitalism from primary capitalist states to their secondary counterparts sets in motion new cycles of domination and devastation. For Britain, the continued retreat from its past ‘glories’ of global empire back to an island nation, as symbolised in the demand for Brexit, may well reflect a continued inability to reconcile British (read English) identity with the effects of the empire. Departure from the European Union has the potential to create further capitalist crises for the UK which will result in the search for new “spatio-temporal fixes.” That this might be achieved through secondary capitalist states, like Saudi Arabia, will only highlight the gulf between Britain’s self-identity and the historical reality it has left in its wake.

**Bibliography**


La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoua (1979)

A portrait of Algerian Women in the Aftermath of the War of Independence

By: Amina Abdel-Halim

Throughout history, women’s bodies have often become the ideological battlefields on which colonial and anticolonial struggles are waged. In her account of British colonial depictions of the Hindu Sati ritual, Mani\(^1\) argues that women are either represented as the silent and stoic martyrs of a patriarchal society, or as helpless weeping victims, thrust into the flames against their will. The same can very much be said of Algerian women in the arts, upon whom the West casts its Orientalist gaze, and on whom the Algerian nation places the burden of cultural representation. Most works depicting Algerian women during and after the War of Independence (1954-1962), have failed to do justice to their crucial roles in obtaining independence from France.

This paper analyzes the evolving representations of Algerian women in visual and cinematic cultures. It focuses on the 1979 film La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoua, directed by Assia Djebar, to explore the ways in which this work has managed to defy both the colonial

and patriarchal gazes cast upon the women of Algeria. In doing so, it will initially provide a brief overview of the sociohistorical context within which the film is situated. It will then delve into the most prominent representations of Algerian women in visual and cinematic arts, and their various problematics. Finally, it will analyze three particular aspects of La Nouba: how the film presents an explicitly feminine perspective on the War of Independence and its aftermath, why Djebar’s feminism can be qualified as “postcolonial,” and how the film tackles and interrogates the limits of translation and transnational knowledge production.

**Socio-historical context**

**a) Algerian women during the War**

In the mid-1950s, the wide majority of Algerians were unable to read and write. Only 13% of Algerian men and 4.5% of the country’s indigenous women were literate. Public education in the colonized nation was primarily conducted in French, private education in Arabic. The public schooling system was largely based on the French educational curriculum, with one fundamental difference: education was mandatory for all boys between the ages of six and fourteen, but not for girls of the same age. As such, few girls received basic education, and fewer even went on to pursue higher studies. The University of Algiers had a primarily French student body. Only 500 Algerian students were enrolled, 50 of whom were women. Algerian women were also widely excluded from political participation; both by the French colonial authorities, and by the Algerian oppositional parties. Women were allowed membership in two oppositional parties, the Parti du Peuple Algérien, and the Communist Party. Yet even within those two parties they were attributed only minor roles, and relegated to “women-only task forces.” The latter were charged primarily with social organization, rather than direct political action.2

In spite of the setbacks imposed on them both by colonization and by patriarchy, when the War of Independence broke out in 1954, women immediately joined the struggle. Their roles were pivotal and widely varied: some served as nurses, cooks; provided refuge to fighters, or collected provisions and medical supplies to heal the wounded. Others served as long distance messengers, traveling tens of kilometers on foot to deliver strategic information. Many also joined the armed resistance, or “maquis,” smuggling weapons and planting bombs in the European quarters of Algiers; or conducting guerilla warfare in the countryside. Women constituted 16% of the maquis, with nearly three-quarters of female militants under the age of 25. If captured by the French authorities, men and women were tortured indiscriminately -a fifth of those young women were killed in battle.3 The number of women engaged in all aspects of the Resistance was estimated at 11,000; making up 3.1% of all those participating in the war -the same percentage of European women who took part in the Second World War. Amrane argues, however, that this number is an understatement. That is, only women charged with providing refuge to male fighters in hiding were added to the FLN (National Liberation Front) register. Women assisting in the collection of supplies or provisions, or otherwise providing assistance to the fighters were not considered militants. In the author’s words “militant women who were listed were

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the nucleus around which a whole support network revolved.”

It was in urban guerilla warfare that the maquisardes’ roles were most crucial. Cities were placed under stricter control than rural areas by the French authorities, with curfews and heavy restrictions on freedom of movement. Women, who could easily be mistaken for civilians, enjoyed greater freedom of movement than their male counterparts. Urban female fighters were charged with the trafficking of money, medicine, and weaponry; as well as directly carrying out attacks. The most crucial instances of female militancy took place during the Battle of Algiers, which lasted from January to September 1957. During the battle, suspects were routinely rounded up, and each time, waves of arrest ensued. As such, the male fighters were quickly immobilized, and it was the women who took over their combat roles, actively directing urban guerilla warfare. With many male fighters imprisoned, they also provided a link between incarcerated members of the resistance and those still on the outside. Women were also largely responsible for providing legal defense to prisoners, organizing demonstrations outside of the Barberousse prison and in front of government offices, and for delivering news of executions at the prison. While women did not traditionally attend burials, during the Battle of Algiers, female resistance members often organized demonstrations to mark the burial of deceased militants. Resistance fighters caught by the French authorities were tortured ruthlessly, irrespective of gender. Similarly, women caught collaborating with the enemy would face the same sanctions as men: collaboration was a crime punishable by death. Flood further argues that women were often exposed to other forms of violence that did not impact men to the same extent. Rape by French soldiers was notably a widespread method of warfare.

b) Algerian women after the War

The Algerian War of Liberation was thought to mark an important step forward in achieving gender equality in the country. The maquisardes had lived side by side with their male compatriots for years, engaging in all the same tasks as men and actively partaking in military as well as political endeavours. Yet after independence was gained in 1962, women were slowly erased from the public and political spheres, as well as from dominant historical narratives. In May 1962, the CNRA (Conseil National de la Révolution Algérienne), met in Tripoli to work out a plan for the FLN’s transition from a revolutionary movement to a political party, in preparation for formal independence. At the outcome of this meeting, the Tripoli Program dedicated one section to “the realization of the aspirations of the masses.” The last point in the section, “Women’s Liberation,” committed the party to recruiting more women among its ranks. Yet once independence was finally declared in July of the same year, women progressively disappeared from politics and from public discourse. Many female militants felt that the equal status they had enjoyed in the maquis had been taken away after the war and that the FLN was excluding women from key positions and active political participation. In the party’s post-war decision-making bodies, several discussions revolved around whether

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4 Amrane, “Women And Politics,” 63
7 Ibid, 344
8 Amrane, Les Femmes Algériennes, 21-43
9 Flood, “Women Resisting Terror”, 111
allowing women to take paid jobs would go against traditional family values.\textsuperscript{10}

The First National Assembly Meeting comprised 194 members, only 10 of whom were women. In the Second National Assembly Meeting, those numbers further dropped to two women out of 138 members. Already during the war, the FLN had been split between a more left-leaning nationalist branch, and a conservative Islamo-Ba'athist branch, with the second branch progressively gaining ideological terrain. In 1963, a commission was charged with preparing a pilot study for the institution of a new “Family Code,” bringing together people in high office, jurists, religious dignitaries and representatives of the UNFA (Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes/Union of Algerian women). No agreement could be reached on the matter, on account of the extreme political differences between the members of that commission. In 1965, a military coup overthrew Ahmed Ben Bella’s government and installed a more repressive socialist military regime under the leadership of Colonel Houari Boumediene. In 1976, Boumediene’s regime put in place a new Constitution after conducting a referendum. The 1976 Constitution praised the socialist system adopted by the regime as a democratic movement that would promote justice, “strive against backward thinking, and make adjustments to the legal justice system to improve women’s conditions.”\textsuperscript{11} Yet Turshen\textsuperscript{12} argues that the Boumediene administration’s commitment to women’s emancipation was only nominal. The socialist government in fact further limited the responsibilities of the UNFA and restricted women’s roles in the political reconstruction of the nation.

The making of La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoua, in 1978, coincides with the rise to power of President Chadli Benjedid, who ascended to the presidency through the support of the Islamo-Ba’athist branch of the FLN (the only party allowed in the country). Under his administration, many concessions were granted to the Islamist fundamentalist component of the opposition. Those concessions, argues Amrane, nearly always concerned the status of women and the structures of the Algerian family; culminating in the institution of a deeply repressive Family Code which granted women the status of “minors” before the law.\textsuperscript{13,14} Article 8 of the Family Code institutionalized polygamy “within the limits of the Shari’a.” Article 39 legally required women to obey their husbands, breastfeed their children, and serve their husbands’ families as well as their own. Article 53 stated that while men were allowed to request a divorce at any time for any reason, women were bound to a strict list of “valid reasons” for doing the same. Article 61 required divorced women to take a three months-long legal period of retirement, during which they were forbidden from leaving the conjugal home except in cases of “duly established immoral action.”\textsuperscript{15} The institution of the Family Code resulted in increased levels of homelessness among women and children, both of whom were dramatically impacted by the consequences of divorce, as women had no right to the family home.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11}Zahia Smail Salhi, “Algerian Women, Citizenship, And The ‘Family Code’,” Gender And Development 11, no. 3 (2003): 29.
\bibitem{12}Turshen, “Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle”, 895
\bibitem{13}Ibid, 903
\bibitem{14}Salhi, “Algerian Women, Citizenship”, 35
\bibitem{15}“Code De La Famille Algérienne”, 1-2 § (2007).
\bibitem{16}Turshen, “Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle”, 894
\end{thebibliography}
Evolving Representations of Algerian Women

It is difficult to explain why Algerian women were the most deeply impacted both by colonial occupation and by attempts at the reclamation of a “pre-colonial identity.” Kassab notes that the construction of postcolonial identity in the Arab world was often articulated between the binaries of leftist nationalism or political Islam. One might therefore argue that the victory of fundamentalist Islamism after Chadli Benjedid’s rise to power was a main factor contributing to the marginalization of women. But as Amrane notes, beside personal status law, no other aspect of the legal system was rewritten in accordance with Islamic interpretation. Why then did the rearticulation of national or religious identity primarily target women - and not, for instance, laws governing the market, structures of parliament, or the voting system?

In a chapter of A Dying Colonialism (1959) titled “Algeria Unveiled,” Frantz Fanon notes that a nation’s traditional clothing is among the primary identifiers of national identity. In Algeria, while men’s clothes can vary according to social status, profession, and region of origin, women typically wear the white veil after reaching puberty. It is through the image of the woman donning this veil that Algerian-ness becomes recognizable. In Fanon’s view, the patrilineal structure of Algerian society is underlined by a matrilineal order, wherein the mother, grandmother, and the older woman play a crucial part in defining tradition and cultural identity. It is for this reason that the veil became a target of French colonial discourse.

Social workers and charities flooded into the Arab quarters with the nominal goal of saving Algerian women from the Barbaric men who bound them to the domestic sphere, of helping those women achieve the same level of emancipation and enlightenment as their European counterparts. The centrality of the veil and of the politics of the female body - to both colonial and postcolonial discourse - has largely shaped the representation of Algerian women throughout the ages.

Among the best-known depictions of Algerian women from the colonial era is Delacroix’s 1834 painting “Women of Algiers in their Apartments.” In his work, a faint ray of sunlight pours into the otherwise dark room where three pale women sit unveiled on the carpeted floor, attended to by a Black servant. Khannous characterizes the painting as a representation of the “colonial night” into which these Algerian women are thrust. The artist casts a forbidden gaze into the harem, both metaphorically and visually “unveiling” the Oriental woman. Similarly, the first filmmaker to openly tackle the French colonization of Algeria in his work was Alain Resnais. In his films, the rape of the veiled Algerian woman was a central metaphor for the crimes of the French in their colony.

This centrality of the veil points to a larger issue: it is through women’s bodies that a nation articulates its identity. As such, the female body becomes the terrain where assimilation and cultural resilience are in constant conflict.

Flood argues that the role played by women in the War of Independence is “both highly pub-

18 Amrane, “Women And Politics,” 72
20 Ibid, 45-47
21 Touria Khannous, “The Subaltern Speaks: Assia Djebar’s La Nouba”, Film Criticism 26, no. 2 (2001): 50
22 Khannous, “The Subaltern Speaks”, 42
licized and often ignored or underestimated.”

The FLN did indeed hold up its female militants -Djamila Bouhired, Zohra Drif, Djamila Amrane, to name a few- on both the domestic and international scenes as a testament to its progressive values; and popular culture has followed course. Two of the best-known cinematic works to tackle the War of Independence are the 1958 film Djamila Al-Jazaireya (Djamila the Algerian), directed by the Egyptian Youssef Chahine; and the 1966 film The Battle of Algiers, directed by the Italian Gillo Pontecorvo. The first film centers on a seminal figure of the struggle for independence, Djamila Bouhired, a maquisarde who was among the first fighters to plant bombs in the European quarters of Algiers in 1957; and was later captured and ruthlessly tortured by the colonial authorities. In popular culture, Bouhired’s militancy has come to be held up as a national symbol of revolution. I have not seen Djamila Al-Jazaireya and cannot comment on it, however, in another of his films, the autobiographical Hadouta Misriya (An Egyptian Story), Chahine admits to having “never set foot in Algeria” before making the film. One character jokes that Chahine could not even “situate Algeria on a map.”

The Battle of Algiers, on the other hand, was widely praised for its realism and exceptional focus on the female combatants, who were first among the fighters to plant bombs in the European quarters of the capital. Flood acknowledges the 1966 film’s success in showcasing women’s involvement in the titular battle, but also suggests that it “foreshadows the exclusion of women from the national narrative.” Amrane similarly commends Pontecorvo’s remarkable account of the techniques employed by the French army, and the methods of resistance put forth by the inhabitants of the Casbah (Arab quarter). However, the author also notes that the film’s focus on military techniques and systematic organized repression may have taken away from other aspects of the battle, including the involvement of women. Women fighters are definitely present on screen. Their appearances are memorable and dominate the first and last shots of the film. However, those female combatants are only attributed 15 of the film’s 121 minutes of screen time. The film further highlights the importance of the Barberousse prison as a center of radicalization and recruitment for the FLN, but fails to depict the female prisoners and visitors’ strategic roles in organizing resistance both on the inside and on the outside. Drawing on her own experiences as a former maquisarde, Amrane further argues that the fact the fact that individual women speak very scarcely throughout the film is problematic. Indeed, communal life in the maquis was characterized by frequent, heated political debates between fighters, in which women actively took part. She further notes that, when screened to a group of formerly incarcerated female veterans, The Battle of Algiers provoked very negative reactions.

La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoua (1979)

Even the most progressive among the above-mentioned examples still failed to adequately portray women’s involvement in the War of Independence. La Nouba des Femmes du Mont Chenoua (1979), directed by Assia Djebar, is exceptional in that it provides an explicitly female and decolonial perspective on the war and on women’s experiences and activ-

23 Flood, “Women Resisting Terror”, 110
24 Amrane, “Women And Politics,” 73
25 Flood, “Women Resisting Terror”, 112
26 Amrane, “The Representation Of Women”, 342
27 Ibid, 348
ism. Furthermore, while most works depicting women’s activism have centered on the battles conducted in the capital of Algiers, La Nouba focuses on the experiences of rural women, who were left worse off than their urban counterparts in the aftermath of independence. 28 To make the film, Assia Djebar returned to her native village, Cherchell, in the mountain of Chenoua. In Cherchell, she collected the war memories and other stories of the women of her tribe, several of whom appear in the film and recount their real experiences. The film also features a fictional plot line, in which Lila (Sawsan Noweir), searches for information about her brother, who disappeared during the war. Lila is accompanied by her husband, Ali, who was paralyzed in a horseback riding accident; and her daughter, Aicha.

La Nouba combines documentary, fiction, oral history, and music to provide a nonlinear account of Lila and the other women’s experiences. The title sequence dedicates this work to the warrior Zouleikha, native to the village of Cherchell; and to Hungarian musician Bela Bartok, who came to a “practically mute” Algeria in 1913 to study popular music. This dedication is mirrored in the structure of the film, which is conceived as a musical composition. 29 The term “nouba” means “turn” in the Algerian and Moroccan dialects; and it is also a type of symphony in classical Andalusian music. The title is thus both a reference to the structure of the film and the music which is performed, sung, and danced to by the villagers; and a reference to the women of Chenoua who are finally speaking “in their turn” (à leur tour.)

28 Amrane, “Women And Politics,” 70-75
29 Khammou, “The Subaltern Speaks”, 43
alluring or dominant woman on screen. From the onset, through her physical positioning and gazing out of the open window, Lila is associated with the “exterior,” whereas Ali is associated with the “interior,” reversing the patriarchal notion of women as “housebound” and tied to the domestic sphere. The film features numerous dislocated shots of the vast landscape of Mount Chenoua, overlaid with the female villagers’ narrations of their memories of war.3233 This juxtaposition could signify the women’s embrace of the outside world, further cement the association of “woman” with “outside”, or refer to the maquisardes’ -like Zouleikha- intimate knowledge of the landscape where they once conducted military campaigns.

Several more scenes emphasize the contrast between Ali’s immobility and confinement to the home, and Lila’s freedom and fluidity of movement. Notably, one sequence shows Lila’s husband sat in the center of the room, most of his body left in the shadows, his shadowy depiction reminiscent of Delacroix’s “Women of Algiers.” Ali looks out the window, struggling to catch a glimpse of the world of the village women. His voyeuristic gaze is countered by that of a little girl who, in turn, positions herself in the center of the window frame, blocking his view and casting her own gaze onto the paralysed man. Her intrusive stares are only brought to a halt by Lila stepping into the room and shutting the blinds. Thus Ali is not only prevented from looking, his only protection against the world and the intrusive looks of outsiders is his wife: Lila holds agency over her own body, as well as the body of her husband. All the more, the early arrival of a man into the feminine space of the village presents itself as an intrusion, or interruption, through the use of a noncontinuous cut. Laura Mulvey has critiqued the way in which mainstream cinema commonly presents the entrance of women into the frame as an interruption of the narrative or plot line -men are thus granted narrative agency while women’s appearances are constructed as “spectacle.”34La Nouba resists this patriarchal convention by placing women’s agency as the driving force behind the succession of images (despite the absence of a plot line). The man’s arrival is not sexualized/ spectacularized, however, it is only brought into meaning by his meeting with the female protagonist.

At several points, viewers are confronted with an all-male musical ensemble, performing the titular Nouba on the beach at the bottom of the mountain. A single woman sits among them, she does not play any instruments but claps along to the music. Their performance is intercut with images of the burning mountains during the war, and overlaid with the sounds of battle: airplanes, screams, gunshots, and explosions. The sole female member of the musical ensemble makes a second appearance, leading the male musicians up the mountain. From this image the film cuts to a flashback of a healthy Ali, majestically riding his horse through town. When he falls off the horse, the camera tilts up to show Lila standing on the balcony, watching the incident unfold. The first lyrics of the Nouba resound against an image of the distraught Ali, waking from his flashback. The film cuts back to the musical ensemble, revealing that the sole female member of the group is in fact the lead singer - a discovery rendered all the more significant by the fact that La Nouba is structured as a musical symphony. Read in conjunction with the film’s depiction of Ali’s accident, which is understood to be a fragment of his memory,
but still shot from the point of view of Lila on the balcony; the gradual portrayal of the female lead singer reinforces the film’s explicitly feminine standpoint.

b) A decolonial feminism

Bensmaia and Gage describe the “esthetic of the fragment” that characterizes the film, noting that it does not follow a clear narrative, nor does it feature a dominant protagonist. La Nouba navigates a multitude of spaces, both physical and psychological, visual and auditory, reflecting key moments within the characters’ lives and narrations of their experiences. The authors argue that films falling within this tradition of fragmentation usually consist of a number of “series,” or groupments of images; with La Nouba consisting of at least five such series. The first is the fictional “couple series,” which is built around Lila, her husband, and their daughter. The second is the documentary series based on the women and children of mount Chenoua. The third is a series of dream-like and poetic images inspired by the women’s narration, which combines documentary and fiction. The fourth is the series comprising shots of the land and sea. The fifth is the “archival” documentary series, which comprises archival footage and images of resistance and repression during the war. The series are neither subordinate nor codependent, they are not governed by a logical or hierarchical organization as they would be in a work of mainstream narrative cinema -there is no “center of gravity”. The images and sounds are also not guided by Lila’s sole perspective, but erupt from the collective subjectivity of the women of Cherchell. At several points, Lila emphasizes her desire to stop speaking and “listen” to the women of her tribe. Through the women’s narrations of their experiences, and through the act of listening, the autobiographical “I” becomes merged with the collective voices of the villagers. Djebar’s feminism is different from that of Western feminists, because it is rooted in the particular modes of social organization specific to rural Algeria. Those modes of organization are based on a communal rather than individual consciousness.

Khannous further describes La Nouba des Femmes du Mont-Chenoua as an example of feminist “cinematic counter-telling,” a feature which characterizes Third World cinema produced by women. Discussions of Third World cinema must engage the question of national identity, and hence, a construction of feminist politics and identity rooted in the cultural context of the filmmaker’s country of origin. La Nouba does not only negate the male gaze, but also negates the colonial gaze cast upon the postcolonial Algerian subject. Again, Fanon’s notion of “unveiling” comes into play. In the years following Algerian independence, Western mediatic discourse would often invoke the “return of the veil” as a testament to the cultural regression brought on by decolonization. The film subverts this colonial notion through the inclusion of a scene where veiled women whisper amongst themselves while carrying hidden weapons down the mountain. Several more shots of archival footage featured veiled women among the resistance fighters confronting the French soldiers. During the War of Independence, the veil was at once an instrument of strategic and symbolic resis-

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35 Bensmaia and Gage, “Introduction to the Cinematic Fragment”, 880
36 Ibid, 880-881
37 Khannous, “The Subaltern Speaks”, 45-52
38 Ibid, 45
39 Khannous, “The Subaltern Speaks”, 41
tance. Both Fanon and Amrane recount instances of women carrying heavy arms under their veils, and others of men masquerading as veiled women in order to get past French military checkpoints. Djebbar therefore transforms what the West has termed a primary signifier of oppression into a symbol of female empowerment. Khannous notes that the veil is at once a shield against the colonizer, and a shield against the patriarchal male gaze, allowing women to look without being looked at in return. By wearing the veil, Algerian women become the subjects, rather than the objects of the gaze.

C) The issue of translation:

Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is a seminal work of postcolonial theory. In this essay, the author answers the titular question in the negative, explaining that knowledge and discursive production is concentrated in the West, which makes no attempt to create spaces for the colonial subaltern to produce their own discourses on history. Women of the Third World, she argues, are doubly effaced, as both colonial and patriarchal subalterns. Thus within the dominant discourses of representation the gendered subaltern is doubly silenced, hence Spivak’s assertion that she “cannot speak." This, however, does not negate the possibility for the gendered subaltern’s expression within other spaces and contexts, but barriers of cultural access and language determine the straining limitations of those contexts. La Nouba is a film which attempts to place knowledge production in the hands of Algerian women, by presenting, recording and translating their stories into the colonial language (French) to render their voices accessible to the international viewer. But the film is also critical of its own capacity for adequate representation.

As previously stated, Lila places continuous emphasis on her task as a listener, rather than speaker in the film. The act of listening to the subaltern speak in film brings truth to Spivak’s assertion that «representation has not withered away» and that «the female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.” The women of Mount Chenoua, however, can only speak in their own dialectic language. Khannous provides an example directly from the film, namely the story of the warrior Zouleikha. Upon her capture in the forest at the hands of the French authorities, Zouleikha screamed out to the crowd of partisans who were crying over her arrest “why are you crying? See, all this turmoil is because of a woman.” Those were her last known words before she was tortured and eventually killed by her captors. Before dying, Zouleikha has spoken to and against the colonizers and the patriarchy; but her message is lost and effaced from formal history because it cannot be translated. All the more, Lila’s French voice-over covers the woman’s Arabic and is supplemented by French subtitles, which raises further questions about the limits of translation: how truthfully can one represent a person’s history in the enemy’s language?

Similarly, another one of Lila’s interlocutors, an older lady named Djamila, conveys the story of her ancestor, Sidi Abdelrahman. Djamila says Sidi Abdelrahman was married seven times.  

40 Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled”, 51-53  
41 Ibid, 54-55  
42 Amrane, “Women And Politics,” 68  
43 Khannous, “The Subaltern Speaks”, 42  
45 Khannous, “The Subaltern Speaks”, 49-50  
46 Ibid, 48
times. She describes the seventh wife as a foreigner who left in secret on the day of her wedding to “know” and “see” the little store where people collected basic necessities like “samna, oil, and wheat.” The French subtitles describe Sidi Abdelrahman’s seven “stepdaughters,” the seventh one was a foreigner who went to the “place” where people collected their basic necessities like “honey, oil, and wheat.” The inaccuracy of the subtitles reflects the way that history can be lost in translation. Samna is a food something which French viewers are not familiar with, and the notion of a man being married seven times may also seem alien to international viewers. The idea of the woman wanting to know and see the place, to experience it with her own senses, is similarly lost on the foreign spectator. Nevertheless, Djamila’s account is laid over images of the woman in question dancing among the jars of food which she has opened to the detriment of the other villagers; but also images of the mountain, of female villagers, and little girls. The images may point to what Fanon terms the “matrilineal order” of Algerian society, which he argues is even more essential to Algerian social structures than patrilineal descendance. The stories of the women of Mount Chenoua may not be recorded in dominant accounts of history, but this matrilineal order and the transgenerational transmission of history has managed to survive the colonial erasure of the subaltern’s voice; it is manifested in those three generations: Djamila, Lila, and the little girls, still transferring the stories woman to woman.

47 Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled”, 44

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