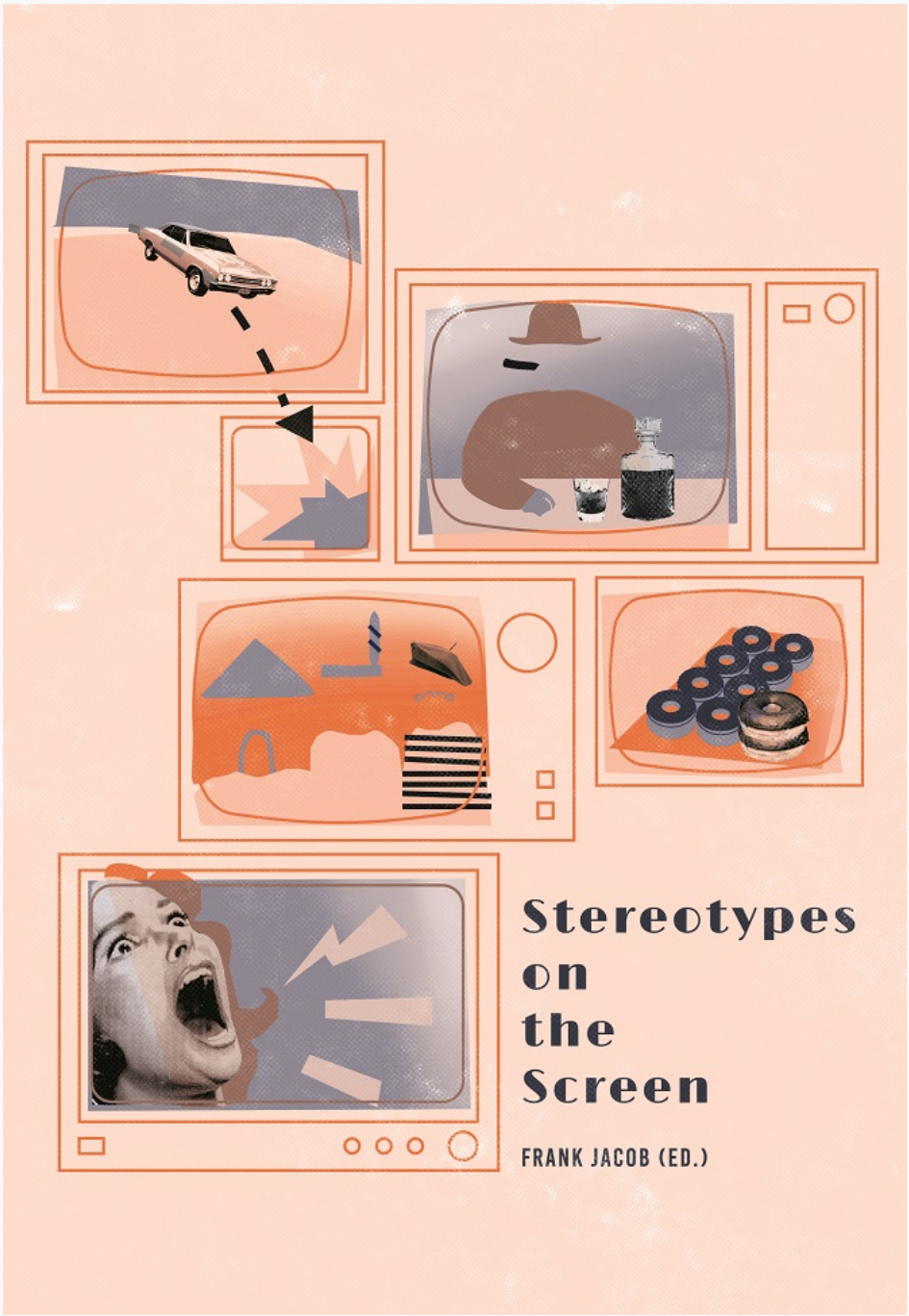
Entertainment - Journal of Media and Movie Studies

Vol 1 (2016)

Stereotypes on the Screen



Entertainment – Journal of Media and Movie Studies

Volume 1

2016

Stereotypes on the Screen

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Entertainment – Journal of Media and Movie Studies 1

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Coverdesign by Smakelig / Judith Weber, Berlin
ISBN: 978-1537462271

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"'I want to be white, like I look': The case of the *Imitation of Life* and the Motion Picture Production Code during the mid-1930s"

Kathleen STANKIEWICZ

Introduction

The 1934 film, *Imitation of Life,* examined the contentious relationship between two African American women, Delilah and her daughter Peola, played by Louise Beavers (1902-1962) and Fredi Washington (1903-1994) respectively. The drama between mother and daughter revolved around Peola's light skin color and her attempts to pass as a white woman much to her mother's dismay. This racial conflict culminated in a scene where Delilah and Peola directly addressed Peola's desire and rationale to pass as a white woman. In this particular scene, a jazz band played jovially for the white guests upstairs, while Delilah, the quintessential aunt jemima-figure of old Hollywood, followed her troubled daughter, Peola, to their basement quarters. Throughout her life, Peola struggled with her skin color. Though she was African American, Peola's skin was light, and she often "passed" as white in school. In a loving tone, Delilah asked, "What's my baby want?" While gazing into a mirror, Peola heatedly responded, "I want to be white, like I look!" Although this bitter conflict had been ongoing, the flabbergasted Delilah could only utter Peola's name in response. While still looking in the mirror, Peola replied, "Look at me. Am I not white? Isn't that a white girl?" After a brief pause, but still in her sweet tone, Delilah asked Peola, "Oh's, honey. We's has this out so many times. Can't you get it out of your head?" Without hesitation, Peola morosely retorted, "No, I can't! You wouldn't understand that, would you? Oh, what is there for me anyway?!"[1]

[1] *Imitation of Life,* directed by John Stahl (Universal Studios, 1934). DVD.

Not only did this scene encapsulate the struggle between mother and daughter, but it also captured the broader struggle of African Americans' racial status in Hollywood. During these early decades of the silver screen, films reflected and reinforced white perceptions of African American through the use of stereotypes, which bolstered Hollywood's racial hierarchy. Peola represented the trope of the tragic mulatto. Her light skin tone and straight hair put her in racial limbo - where she felt too light to be black, but not accepted by white society.[2] Delilah embodied the physical and mental traits of the aunt jemima - figure due to her darker skin tone combined with her rotund nature and childlike disposition.[3] While these two characters personified the stereotypical African American roles in the movie, the characters of Peola and Delilah also challenged the newly imposed Motion Picture Production Code. Beginning in 1934, with the authority to evaluate and censor films, the Production Code Administration (PCA) upheld the standards of the Motion Picture Production Code (the Code), which regulated the entire film-making process. Even with the censors' approval, the film incited varying local reactions over the portrayals of African American stereotypes and miscegenation. Contemporary critics, viewers, and subsequent scholars had two distinct views of the film - that it bolstered African Americans and challenged Hollywood stereotypes or that it reaffirmed African Americans negative and secondary roles in film.[4] While the movie reflected some

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[2] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films,* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 9-10, 60.

[3] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks*, 62-63.

[4] For Bogle, the *Imitation of Life* "humanized the role of the Negro servant."[4] In particular, he connects the 1930s new dynamic nature for black roles to the impact of the New Deal, which Bogle sees, as a force for a more egalitarian American society. Though Bogle attempts to situate the film in a broader context, he does not bring in its complications with the PCA or how audiences viewed it in the 1930s. See also: Ryan Jay Friedman, *Hollywood's African American Films: the Transition to Sound*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 187. Ryan Friedman adopts a similar approach to Bogle in *Fire and Desire*. Although Friedman's work

progress for African Americans in Hollywood by pushing against the racial stereotypes, it did so within the specific framework of the Code and Hollywood's notions of racial hierarchy. Films such as *Imitation of Life* utilized stereotypes to reinforce the white racial dominance over African Americans, especially through the relationship between the two female leads of Bea and Delilah and the use of stereotypes of the aunt jemima and mulatto.

Applying the Code

Hollywood adopted the Code in 1934 as a way to stave off the impact of the Depression by appeasing critics and luring Americans back into the theater. While some Hollywood tycoons and elite actors, writers, and directors still made outlandish salaries, many people within the industry found themselves unemployed. In general, the film industry cut down the number of films they produced and struggled to get Americans into the movie theater.[5] Hollywood occupied a cryptic space during this time of economic downturn, political realignment, and cultural change. Despite carrying the label as a "liberal" space, the movie industry during the 1930s, similar

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concentrates on mixed-race relationships in the silent era (1920s), he does mention the *Imitation of Life* in his conclusion. For Friedman, although he describes the film as "socially conscious," overall he finds that films of the 1930s placed African Americans firmly in a negative servant role. Both Bogle and Friedman's works highlight the complicated nature of the *Imitation of Life*. Although Delilah and Peola fulfilled typically negative black stereotypes in 1930s film, both Bogle and Friedman overlook these subordinate positions in favor of the complex social issues that the film addressed. For feminist critiques of the film see: Marina Heung, "What's the Matter with Sara Jane?": Daughters and Mothers in Douglas Sirk's 'Imitation of Life,'" *Cinema Journal* (Spring, 1987): 23-24; Miriam Thaggert, "Divided Images: Black Female Spectatorship and John Stahl's *Imitation of Life*, *African American Review* (1998): 482. For information on the film's distribution: Matthew Bernstein and Dana F. White, "*Imitation of Life* in a segregated Atlanta: its promotion, distribution, and reception," *Film History: An International Journal* (2007): 153.

[5] Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 36.

to the rest of the United States, was abuzz with conflicting political ideologies and interpretations of the impact of the Great Depression on everyday life. Hollywood was a hotbed for liberal ideas of socialism and communism, but many of the studio heads and their administrations became more entrenched in political conservatism.[6] During this moment of dynamic change within the film industry, Universal decided to adapt Fannie Hurst's (1885-1968) 1933 novel *Imitation of Life* for the screen. Due to the book's popular following, Universal took on the challenge of turning this social commentary on race into a successful film.

The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) agreed to adopt the Code as a way to prevent boycotts and quell complaints over films. Since the Progressive Era, moral reformers had targeted movies (both the theaters and the content of film) as part of their reform movement.[7] These reformers argued that films promoted

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[6] For more on Hollywood liberalism see, Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For more on Hollywood conservatism see, Donald Critchlow's controversial work *When Hollywood Was Right: How Movie Stars, Studio Moguls, and Big Business Remade American Politics,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Two recent works examine the development of Hollywood's connections to both the Democratic and Republican parties. See: Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Kathryn Cramer Brownell, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[7] The earliest works on reform movements during the Progressive era tended to focus on the role of Anthony Comstock, the YMCA, and the need to reform print materials, such as pamphlets, brochures, and novels that were considered lewd. See, Paul Boyer, *Purity in Print: Book Censorship in America from the Gilded Age to the Computer Age*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). There is a rich history of the moral reformers and anti-obscenity movements of the Progressive Era. See: Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Allison M. Parker*, Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873 -1933,*

obscene material, which featured scandalous topics such as white slavery, salacious plotlines, gangster violence, excessive alcohol consumption, drug use, and the like. Due to the 1915 Supreme Court ruling in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Ohio*, First Amendment protections were not extended to the film industry. As such, these reform groups began advocating for federal censorship in addition to the emergent censorship boards at the local and state levels in order to stymie the myriad of problems they saw with films. In response to the ever-increasing calls for reform, the motion picture industry went through a string of different self-regulation mechanisms during the 1920s. While the hiring of former postmaster general Will Hays (1879-1954) in 1922 and his subsequent film reform efforts helped to curb some of the reform calls, by the early 1930s, the reform movement moved beyond women's groups and progressive reformers, and attracted the attention of bigger organizations such as the Catholic Church, which threatened mass boycotts.[8] In order to thwart further calls for federal censorship of motion pictures, the film industry officially implemented a system of self-regulation and adopted the Motion Picture Production Code and created the Production Code Administration, placing Catholic layman Joseph Breen (1888-1965) in charge to interpret and enforce the Code.

Beginning in 1934, the PCA began its task of regulating the film industry. Even though *Imitation of Life* was only in pre-

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(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Leigh Ann Wheeler, *Against Obscenity: Reform and the Politics of Womanhood in America, 1873-1935*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[8] For more on the history of the Motion Picture Production Code see: Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Leonard J. Leff and Jerold Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code,* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

production in early-1934, the PCA was already dissecting the script. While Universal described the film as a melodrama that centered on the travails of a white mother and her daughter, the PCA recognized the substantial impact of the secondary plot of the film that focused on the characters of Delilah and Peola: "Fanny Hurst's novel dealing with a partly colored girl who wants to pass as white. We have advised the studio that in our opinion it violates the Code clause covering miscegenation, in spirit, if not in fact."[9] Since it was the early days of the organization, PCA officials often over-scrutinized issues that violated the Code, but also any instances that could create public backlash and potentially harm profits. Although miscegenation was a clear concern for the PCA, the character, Peola, was never removed from the film. In a letter to PCA head Joseph Breen from Maurice McKenzie, who worked in administrative MPPDA offices in New York, McKenzie outlined a detailed list of issues he foresaw with the film. He articulated that miscegenation was "not the true issue because it is so far removed."[10] He emphasized different problems that the film presented, including varying uses of profane statements ("Lawd"), references to corporations, and the use of "nigger" even when said by a "colored person."[11] These two documents seem to suggest that the PCA was more concerned with issues of racial characterization than miscegenation in the film. The Code, through the PCA's enforcement, wanted to portray a particular moral view to Americans, and McKenzie's comments reflect how Hollywood viewed African Americans both in reality and on film.

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[9] Production Code Administration Files, April 2, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[10] Maurice McKenzie Letter to Joseph Breen, April 3, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[11] Ibid.

While this particular letter pushed aside the issue of miscegenation, McKenzie still stressed that the picture could present certain problems for audiences as it dealt with the controversial racial topics. He advocated that the "picturization of this subject matter would be fraught with the gravest danger."[12] In particular, he worried over people's reaction to the film in certain geographic regions in the U.S. such as the South and the Border States, but he also mentioned England and Australia.[13] The implicit and explicit references to Peola's character throughout much of the PCA correspondence illustrates that her character and the subplot surrounding her prompted the censors to deeply dissect the dual nature of their office. The PCA's main goal was to enforce the policies of the Code, but this particular instance demonstrates that this was only part of their purpose. In addition to enforcing the rules, they also thought critically about the reception and possible backlash of a film in different domestic and international settings. While the PCA did not directly profit off the films they censored, enough public outcry, especially in the midst of the Depression, could alter the system. Ultimately, McKenzie ended his letter with an "earnest hope that you will be able to persuade the company to abandon its plans for production."[14] Although Universal still carried on with the production of *Imitation of Life*, the pre-production correspondence echoed Hollywood worries to lure Americans back to the movies without causing increased calls for reform.

By late June 1934, the PCA and Universal had been in close contact over the film's treatment of race. While there was still mention of the indirect topic of miscegenation in the movie, the PCA understood that it was not the main plot of the film. "It portrays a light colored negro girl who desires to go white. This, however, is not the main theme of the story. It

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

appears to be a matter of policy more than of Code."[15] Although James Wingate (PCA censor) underscored that the studio was working closely with the PCA to confine the racial discussions within the film, there seems to be some negotiation at play. From April to June 1934, the PCA did not take the option to reject the film outright. In fact, Universal often accepted the PCA's suggestions and adjusted the script. In the correspondence from Universal executive Robert H. Cochrane to Breen, this tepid negotiation is ever-present. Although Cochrane was a fervent supporter of the PCA, his letter reflects the problematic nature of film studios relations with it. While studios were willing to acquiesce to some of the PCA's demands, studios did not always appreciate the rigor to which the PCA enforced Code principles: "But now I want to sound a very quiet note of warning to you. It is natural, under the circumstances, for you to lean over backward in your endeavor to live up to the new responsibilities imposed upon you, and it is also natural for you to lean so far backward that you will break not only your back but ours."[16] While Cochrane supported the idea of self-censorship as a way to increase movie profitability during the Depression, he was not willing to relinquish creative license. He defended the use of profanity in the film by stating that "Everybody knows that the colored people say 'Mah Lo'dy' and 'De Lawd hab mercy' and 'Ah, Gawd."[17] Rather than fear that the potential audience offense to such sayings, Cochrane mused that everybody understood that it was common, understandable vernacular. Yet, what is perhaps most striking about Cochrane's rebuttal to the profane language was how he understood it as a "natural" part of African American life and culture or at least

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[15] James Wingate Letter to Maurice McKenzie, June 26, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[16] R.H. Cochrane Letter to Joseph Breen, July 27, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[17] Ibid.

"natural" to the white audience whom the movie industry depended on. In concluding his letter, Cochrane asked Breen to "not make it utterly impossible for the studios to make pictures which reflect life."[18]

This larger debate between the PCA and Universal studios, although representative of the initial struggle between the two organizations to produce wholesome movies, also suggests deeper issues of how to create more realistic films. Although the main plot of *Imitation of Life* follows the white characters in more depth, the PCA rooted out the possible Code complications concerning the subplot that consisted of African American characters. Both Universal and the PCA were preoccupied with how the audience would react to the racial interactions on the screen. Universal specifically crafted the character of Delilah as the Aunt Jemima, who were either "toms blessed with religion or mammies who wedge themselves into the dominant white culture." [19] Although Delilah pushed the boundaries of the Aunt Jemima by having a stake in a profitable company and a somewhat equal relationship and deep friendship with her white employer Bea, her qualities still rested in the trope - she was good natured, somewhat childlike, and unable to survive without the help and generosity of her white benefactress. By mid-November, the PCA approved *Imitation of Life*.

Delilah, Flapjacks, and Aunt Jemima

Imitation of Life followed the main storylines between the white and black mothers and their daughters, and connecting these two plots was the relationship between Bea, played by Claudette Colbert (1903-1996), and Louise Beaver's Delilah.[20] Although there was a distinct friendship filled with

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks*, 9.

[20] Ibid., 46. In Bogle's section on Louise Beavers' career during the 1930s, he examines how she was able to push the aunt jemima stereotype in new and different ways. He argues that Beavers was able to take a one-dimensional stereotype and give the character depth and significance.

compassion and deep attachment between these two women, throughout the film Bea was the clear, dominating force. Central to Bea's and Delilah's success was Bea's decision to first create a restaurant that served Delilah's flapjacks and then to box and sell a mix of the flapjack dry ingredients. Although the success of this business endeavor rested on Delilah's knowledge of her family flapjack recipe, Delilah's image on the box, and her willingness to share the recipe and care for both her and Bea's daughters, Delilah received only a 25% share of the profits.[21] Even with the eventual success of this venture, Delilah still remained with Bea as a companion and also the main caretaker of the children and the home she shared with her. While Bea enjoyed the comforts of the upper-levels of the home, Delilah and Peola's suites occupied the basement quarters.

Even the PCA recognized this power dynamic between white and black in its initial readings of the script. In a PCA inter-office memo to Breen from Jack Lewis, Lewis commented on the nature of the relationship between Delilah and Bea: "At no time does Bea, the white woman, and her daughter give proper credit to the fortune which they have made on the negro mother's recipe for flapjacks."[22] Lewis's comment demonstrates that the PCA could interpret the basic plot devices of the film. While Lewis's comment grasped the superficial issue, he further argued that "the two negroes continue to appear somewhat downtrodden throughout the plot. It may have been the author's intent to show that the negroes were happiest as servants in the house but this is not clearly brought out."[23] The second portion of the memo suggests the deeper issue within the film - how the film presented African Americans and their acceptance of their roles within the film. Lewis clearly indicated that the white

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[21] *Imitation of Life.*

[22] PCA inter-office memo from J.B. Lewis to Joseph Breen, March 10, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[23] Ibid.

characters benefitted at the expense of the black characters. Even so, his pointed critique does not necessarily suggest that the PCA found the white-black dynamics of the film objectionable, but was unclear in how the audience might react to it.

Other PCA censors also criticized the relationship between Delilah and Bea. While Lewis focused on the relationship dynamics between the two women, some censors commented on how other aspects of the film might overshadow the relationship. In a PCA memo to Breen on the film, Alice Field explained that the relationship between Delilah and Bea, at that stage, would not be the main focus for the audience:

> The only really gripping and dramatic thread in the story is that of Peola's anguish and her old mother's heartbreak over the whole miserable, unsolvable situation. With this element of the story removed the rest would become colorless – and yet it is difficult to see how such a theme can be acceptable presented on the screen. It is all embedded in such deep-lying emotional feeling, colored by race hatred and race sympathy that it would seem to me to offer quite a serious problem.[24]

Even though Field suggested that the film ultimately handled the topic with "kindness," she recommended that the best approach would be to avoid the topic as much as possible.[25] In fact, Field argued that it would be best to avoid Peola's character development (a major part of the plot for the novel as well as the script) in order to avoid censoring the film or any potential popular backlash. At the end of the memo Field directly challenged Breen to reconsider this part of the film script.

> Is it possible that the other part of the story could be more strongly built up – letting Peola die or sumpin' early in the

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[24] Memo on IMITATION OF LIFE from Alice Field to Joseph Breen, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.
[25] Ibid.

> struggle? The wisdom and comedy and of old Delilah, the friendship and success of the two women and a number of things about it are interesting and might be made entertaining as a down to earth human interest drama. As written, however, the dark thread of Peola's tragedy seems to dwarf everything else.[26]

The memos from Lewis and Field to Breen demonstrate that the subplot of the film that focused on Delilah and Peola would be substantive enough to distract audiences from the main white plot as well as Delilah and Bea's friendship. Both Lewis and Field's suggestions in altering the script to remove the possible implications of miscegenation demonstrate how the newly-created PCA began to navigate its duties of enforcing the Code. The Code itself was not just a tool for promoting clean films; it also presented Americans with a specific vision for society at large. While Bea and Delilah's relationship, though unequal, represented the coming together of black and white Americans, Peola as the mulatto posed a potential challenge to how Americans saw and understood their society.

Peola, Passing, and the Tragic Mulatto

In April 1934, McKenzie's letter to Breen argued that miscegenation was not a major issue in terms of the Code, but the interoffice memos of the PCA and letters between the PCA and Universal suggest otherwise. PCA censors Field and Lewis's memos to Breen reveal that the racial dynamics of the film were increasingly pressing issues that the PCA would have to deal with and justify should the film continue into production. In fact, from spring through summer 1934, most of the communication about the film focused on the issue of Peola's light skin tone, the possible implications of miscegenation, and potential backlash throughout the southern states. Historian Donald Bogle has characterized Peola as the "single subversive element" in the film and

[26] Ibid.

articulated that her character moved beyond the stereotype of the mulatto. Peola's potentially troublesome racial make-up occupied the PCA throughout its examination of *Imitation of Life*, it carefully read the script and informed Universal of the potential problems that Peola's wanting to pass as white could cause. Although the film inserted dialogue to clearly state that Peola simply had a lighter skin tone despite both of her parents being African American, this racial dynamic forced the newly established PCA to carefully navigate the racial implications of the film and deal with the potential negative consequences from the American public.

In March 1934, Breen sent a letter to Harry Zehner of Universal after reading the blue script (typically the second revision of a script) of the film. In the letter, Breen's main criticisms of the film indeed focus on Peola's racial predicament. "Its major theme presents the embarrassments, trials, tribulations and humiliations suffered by the white child of a colored mother who, because of the negro blood in her veins, is compelled to be classed as and associate with the negroes, although she has all the hopes, desires and inclinations to pass as a white person."[27] Although Breen understood that Peola's storyline was part of the subplot, and approved of the basic main plot of the film, he nonetheless found Peola's story compelling enough that it violated the miscegenation clause of the Code. Breen articulated to Zehner that "the main theme is founded upon the results of sex association between the white and black race (miscegenation), and, as such, in our opinion, it not only violates the Production Code but is very dangerous from the standpoint both of industry and public policy."[28] By this stage, Breen ended the letter stating that according to the script, the PCA

[27] Letter from Joseph I. Breen to Harry Zehner, March 9, 1935, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.
[28] Ibid.

would reject the film and not provide it with a seal of approval.

This letter to Zehner was not an isolated instance, and Breen conveyed similar sentiments in a PCA interoffice memo concerning the film: "With Dr. Wingate and Mr. Auster, had conference with Mr. Henigson of Universal regrading IMITATION OF LIFE, which is based upon the very serious social problem which comes as the result of miscegenation. We are gravely concerned about it and did not succeed in persuading the company to accept our viewpoint of its danger."[29] The "danger" again referred to Peola's attempts to pass as white and the possible audience inference of miscegenation. In a memorandum for the files, Breen similarly discussed the issue of miscegenation within the film.

> We emphasized the dangers involved in treating this story as regards to the possibilities having to do with negroes. It was our contention that this part of the plot – the action of the negro girl appearing as white – has a definite connection with the problem of miscegenation. We pointed out that not only from the picture point of view of the producer himself, but also from the point of view of the industry as a whole, this was an extremely dangerous subject and surely to prove troublesome, not only in the south, where it would be universally condemned, but everywhere else.[30]

Here, Breen fully articulated the problematic nature of the film. Not only was miscegenation against the Code, but the PCA also had to consider how Americans might react to the film. As the film industry had been under increasing scrutiny from moral reformers who advocated for federal censorship, negative reactions to films could potentially threaten the autonomy and existence of the film industry. Thus, the PCA, in order to protect itself as well as the major studios it

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[29] PCA interoffice memo, March 9, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[30] PCA memorandum for the files, March 9, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

represented, had to consider the consequences of allowing such a film a seal of approval. In this case, Breen's memo conveys the extreme duress that a potentially mixed-race character might cause an American audience—in the North or South. Ultimately, "The producer suggested that to avoid the inference that the leading character was a descendant of a white ancestor, they would definitely establish that her white skin was due to a rare but scientific fact that such a child might come of a line of definitely negro strain."[31] Even with this attempt to quell PCA fears of miscegenation in the film, it still closely monitored the progress of the film.

After Universal's decision to clearly indicate that Peola was a child of two African American parents, the internal communications of the PCA still commented on the issue of miscegenation in the film. In another inter-office memo from Lewis to Breen, Lewis commented on the basic nature of the film. "This script is based wholly on the suggested intermingling of blacks and whites and, although it has no actual case in point, the entire plot evolves on miscegenation which is outlawed under the code."[32] Still, Peola's attempts at passing as white struck a chord with the censors. As Lewis, Breen, and others had suggested, even the most careful of directions could not alter the basic storyline of a black woman wanting to be white, and the potential consequences of this sort of story. In addition, Lewis also articulated another key issue concerning Peola's ambiguous racial status: "All through this story, the unhappy plight of the negro is graphically described and the half-white, half-black girl's desire to mix with whites constantly brings into sharp relief the prejudice against the black race."[33] Lewis's statement hints at the reality of American society - being white offered opportunities, opportunities not offered to black Americans. Peola's

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[31] Ibid.

[32] PCA inter-office memo from J.B. Lewis to Joseph Breen, March 10, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[33] Ibid.

appearance directly criticized the racial hierarchy within America. Although Peola articulated that she wanted to be white like she looked, it was not simple to be white in racial terms, but to gain the benefits that came to being white in America during the 1930s.[34]

In dealing with the predicament of miscegenation in *Imitation of Life,* Breen sought out any forms of precedent from earlier committees that had monitored film content prior to the PCA. While most organizations and attempts at self-regulation of the film industry had failed during the 1920s and early 1930s, there were some bureaucratic ways in which the film industry attempted to reform movies. Most of these cases dealt with themes such as gangster violence or overt sexuality. In the case of the miscegenation, *Imitation of Life* presented the PCA with a complicated case with little past cases to study. In a PCA memorandum for Breen from censor Islin Auster, the latter specifically addressed the issues concerning miscegenation in the film. The purpose of the memorandum was to inform Breen of the different ways in which past PCA-like committees had dealt with miscegenation, to which Auster stated there was very little documentation on the issue in films: "In February, 1928, the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae refused to recommend the picture, THE LOVE MART, produced by First National. The objectionable part of this story was based on the fact that, though the female lead was white, she was at one time thot [sic] to have negro blood in her and as a result was imprisoned with negroes and auctioned off as an octoroon on the slave block."[35] The memorandum mentioned two other films, *Lulu Belle* and *Jungle Rose*, both of which dealt with themes of miscegenation and were ultimately blocked from being produced. Subsequently, Auster ended the memorandum by

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[34] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks*, 60.

[35] Memorandum for Mr. Breen by I. Auster, March 13, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

stating that miscegenation "has always been taboo, and that there has been no opportunity to collect evidence referring to it."[36]

The topic of miscegenation was so troubling to Breen and the PCA, that Breen not only sought out information on past film cases, but he informed his boss, Will Hays, the head of the MPPDA of *Imitation of Life* and the potential issues of miscegenation.[37] By mid-May 1934, Hays sent a letter to Robert Cochrane of Universal Pictures in which he discussed his lament and "considerable worry" concerning the film.[38] In addition to attaching Breen's March 9, 1934 letter to Universal discussing the problematic nature of the film, Hays expressed his own wariness of the film. Whereas the PCA letters to Universal often expressed issue with miscegenation (and a lynching scene, which was ultimately deleted), Hays attempted to appeal to Universal's business acumen. Hays conveyed the issues of miscegenation, but further argued that the subject matter of the film could cause potential backlash and censorship:

> …it deals with persons and situations (lynching scene, pretending to be white when black, etc.) which would cause criticism or prevent exhibition in southern states and possibly some of the border states, as well as many English colonies. The prohibition would also extend to large northern cities which have a substantial percentage of negro population. It is believed the story could not be accepted by southerners and is sure to draw fire there.[39]

Hays echoed the similar issues that Breen and other PCA censors had expressed in their reviews of the film script. The film posed a potential threat to widespread boycott, not just in

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Letter from Will Hays to Joseph Breen, March 20, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[38] Letter from Will Hays to Robert Cochrane, May 18, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

[39] Ibid.

the South or southern Border States, but in major northern cities, which were typically segregated through different housing laws. Ultimately, Hays concluded the letter with a strong suggestion that the film not be made: "Altogether the picture seems a very unfortunate possibility and Mr. Breen is confronted with a very real worry. It may develop into a case very near the borderline so that he will be confronted on the on hand with an anxiety not to be unfair to Universal and on the other hand with his sense of duty to Universal and the other companies, to the industry and to Society. In a case like this, of course, it would be hoped that the picture be no made."[40] Hays's conclusion suggests a major worry for the newly-created PCA. The film not only posed a challenge to the Code, but clearly showed the careful balancing act that the organization would have to engage with when it came to film production. Breen and his PCA had to find out how to allow film companies such as Universal to create compelling films that would bolster the film industry, especially during the midst of the Great Depression, but they were beholden to American audiences and had to navigate to ever-outspoken moral reform groups. While Hays hoped that Universal would not make the motion picture, he and others did not fully outlaw the film.

Conclusion

By late July 1934, the PCA still considered *Imitation of Life* a "dangerous" film.[41] The PCA felt that the film ultimately challenged the clause against depictions of miscegenation in films, and although the film did not depict it, the subject matter alone could be grounds to not approve the film. The PCA further warned Universal, but did not outright reject the

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Letter from Joseph Breen to Harry Zehner, July 20, 1934, "History of Cinema and the Production Code," reel 9. (Microfilm), Margaret Herrick Special Collections Library, Beverly Hills, California.

film and agreed to still view and base its judgment on the final product,

> After reading this script, we still feel that this story is a definitely dangerous one. It is our conviction that any picture which raises and elaborates such an inflammable racial question as that raised by this picture, is fraught with grave danger to the industry, and hence is one which we, in the dispensation of our responsibilities under the Resolution for Uniform Interpretation of the Production Code, may be obliged to reject.[42]

Despite the PCA's warning to Universal about the film, it ultimately passed the censors and earned a seal of approval. Many historians and film scholars point to the tragic ending of the film to the reason why it ultimately passed the censors. At the end of the film, Peola returns to attend her mother's lavish funeral (Delilah's final wish). In this emotional ending, Peola comes to realize her mother's devotion and loyalty to her too late. Historian Donald Bogle contends that Peola "weeping by her mother's casket was Hollywood's slick way of finally humiliating her, its way of finally making the character who had run away with herself, conform to the remorseful mulatto type."[43] It was in Peola's final acceptance of her mother and her blackness that gave the PCA the ability to pass the film. It was not enough that the film's screenwriters added in specific dialogue that explicitly informed the audience of Peola's black parents. Peola had to suffer for her attempts to pass as white. In accepting her blackness, only too late for her mother to see, the character of Peola fully embraced the trope of the tragic mulatto.

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks*, 60.

2.
"An Exotic Anchor of Freedom": Depictions of the South Seas as Paradise in the *Bounty* Movies

Frank JACOB

Introduction

The Mutiny on the *HMS Bounty* is perhaps the best-known mutiny in world history. Descriptions of the historical events were published early on,[1] notably by William Bligh (1754-1817), himself the captain of the ship.[2] The story of the mutineers has been seen as an emblem for rebellion against an autocratic ruler and remains so even today; but it also produces a particular stereotype of the South Seas as a sphere of freedom and happiness, one where men might find relief from the hard life aboard a Royal Navy ship, and where they might enjoy the love of a beautiful Tahitian woman. The image of the South Seas, initially the result of an "ambiguous interplay of . . .[a]. . .gendered racial system, idiosyncrasy, experience and indigenous presence in the production, reproduction and reading of such pictures,"[3] is mainly based on the images and descriptions provided by Captain James Cook (1728-1779), the first European to explore this "exotic" sphere.

Following Cook's first voyages, artists came to play an essential part in creating the public image of the South Seas as exotic islands, as the likes of Tahiti and the other Marquesas Islands within French Polynesia, so much so that the "expanding pictorial corpus became a purportedly mimetic adjunct to increasingly radicalized conceptions of human

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[1] Sir John Barrow, *The Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS Bounty: Its Causes and Consequences* (London: Murray, 1831).

[2] William Bligh, *A Narrative of the Mutiny* (London: Nicol, 1790).

[3] Bronwen Douglas, "Science and the Art of Representing 'Savages': Reading 'Race' in Text and Image in South Seas Voyage Literature," *History and Anthropology* 11:2-3 (1999), 176.

similarities and differences."[4] These stereotypical images have remained in the public consciousness; and in the 20th century they were adapted to the cinematic screen, where palm trees and naked South Sea beauties recalled the sailors' desire for sanctuary in a world parallel to the English ship at sea where they were routinely subjected to brutal punishments by officers on-board. Additionally, American interest in the South Seas was stimulated by several novels about this region, among them Frederick O'Brien's *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1919),[5] the narrative of which "helped to set off a wave of popular interest in the islands and cultures of the South Pacific," and provided "American readers with a desperately needed chance to leave behind traumatic memories of World War I and escape to the plan-fringed beaches of solitary islands."[6] MGM would in 1928 release their silent adventure film directed by W. S. Van Dyke, based on O'Brien's writings and bearing the same title that envisioned "not only the multiple and conflicting dimensions of the American image of the South Pacific but project[ed] the idea of otherness in the American imagination, revealing the deep-seated uncertainties that arise when Western selves and 'native' others collide."[7]

Despite the fact that O'Brien's tale was not the only source for South Sea movies in the first decades of the 20th century, the story of the *HMS Bounty* and its mutineers did nonetheless becomes far more emblematic and much more familiar among a wider popular audience. Consequently, the *Bounty* movies proved most influential in the creation of a particular and nuanced image of the South Seas. Nor should we forget that the narrative events themselves led to several movies focusing on the fate of Fletcher Christian, William Bligh, the crew of the *HMS Bounty* on the one hand and on

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[4] Ibid., 177.
[5] Frederick O'Brien, *White Shadows in the South Seas* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006).
[6] Jeffrey Geiger, "Imagined Islands: White Shadows in the South Seas and Cultural Ambivalence," *Cinema Journal* 41:3 (2002), 98.
[7] Ibid., 99.

the natives of Tahiti on the other. Taken together, five films were produced between 1916 and 1984; all would describe the South Seas by relying on stereotypic representations arising within writings that long pre-dated them. Not surprising, the resultant image matched the preconceived expectations of the audience: exotic spaces, freedom, and love. In short, the films themselves depicted a paradise in staunch contrast to the harsh environment of the ship under the tyrannical rule of Captain Bligh.

At this point, it is perhaps necessary to analyse the three American productions, namely *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935, directed by Frank Lloyd; 1962, directed by Lewis Milestone) and *The Bounty* (1984, directed by Roger Donaldson) to elucidate the particular manner in which the South Seas was depicted. Doing so allows for a larger discussion of the generation of these stereotypes created by the writings and paintings of the late 18th and 19th centuries as they were perpetuated in theatres around the world. By comparing the three works with eyewitness reports from the first voyagers to the South Seas, we might then question whether a steady and continuous image of region and inhabitants alike is, in fact, sustained. Important to this discussion, the combination of the sailors' story on the *HMS Bounty* itself and their sense of relief found on Tahiti that provides a basis of success on the screen, as each film combines these images in a manner that could easily be understood and received by the audiences, namely within the suffering of daily life and the steadfast longing for a trouble-free life in paradise.

***Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935)**

The first two *Bounty* movies (1916, directed by Raymong Longford; 1933, directed by Charles Chauvel) were Australian productions and therefore had a rather minor impact in the United States, but the 1935 Lloyd production starring Clark Gable as Fletcher Christian and Charles Laughton as William Bligh, remains a classic in American cinema. The movie opens

with a foreword, intended perhaps for those within the audience who might not yet be familiar with the story:[8]

> Foreword
>
> In December, 1787, *H.M.S. Bounty* lay in Portsmouth Harbour on the eve of departure for Tahiti in the uncharted waters of the Great South Sea.
>
> The *Bounty*'s mission was to procure breadfruit trees for transplanting to the West Indies as cheap food for slaves. Neither chi nor breadfruit reached the West Indies. Mutiny prevented it – mutiny against the abuse of harsh eighteenth century sea law. But this mutiny, famous in history and legend, helped bring about a new discipline, based upon mutual respect between officers and men, by which Britain's sea power is maintained as security for all who pass upon the seas.

The foreword sets forth the different levels of the film that would follow. First, the mission of the *HMS Bounty*, to bring breadfruits (*uru*) to the West Indies, is explained, while pointing to the perspective of the mutineers as people who had no option but to take action to end the abuses of their officers. It also underlines the changes subsequent to the incident, claiming that the power and strength of the modern British navy was a sole consequence of mutual respect, therefore establishing from the beginning Bligh in a negative light.

Before the journey begins, Christian must forcefully recruit sailors. In a tavern he finds some suitable men, who are immediately pressed into the service of His Majesty's Navy. When the new sailors ask where the ship is supposed to sail, they are shocked by the answer: "The South Seas? But that's the end of the world." Whereas for the common man, there was no stereotypical image as of yet, there does seem to be a cultural interest in Tahiti, as indicated by Sir Joseph's having sent Roger, a young officer, ahead to the island to compile an encyclopaedia of the Tahitian language.

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[8] *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935).

Irrespective of forced recruitment or cultural interest, all the men on the Bounty share one point in common: they agree that they are sailing to the end of the world. Before they set sail, a number of traders attempt to sell them goods. Most notably, a woman suggests that a sailor buy a necklace for ten shillings now, asserting further that in the South Seas he could buy an island with it. Their exchange underscores an intellectual and even racial superiority held by the white sailors, who believed themselves easily capable of tricking the "backward" natives of the South Seas.

Thus, many of the sailors begin their journey with dreams about a new world they might have heard about but which remains shrouded both in mist and mystery. They must first, however, come face to face with the strong hand of Captain Bligh, who rules the ship as a dictator, by using violence. Even before weighing anchor we see him punish a sailor with lashes – although the man is already dead. The image underscores Bligh's violent nature from the start. During the journey, yet another sailor is subjected to two dozen lashes for having struck a superior officer. It is perhaps helpful to recall that punishment was assumed to be a natural part of life aboard ship at that time. Recall the historical case with Captain Cook, who became enraged over the "disappearance of ship's property. […] In pursuit of property, Cook was losing all sense of propriety,"[9] and he punished the sailors for theft by lashes.[10]

Especially from the American perspective, however, a British officer's punishing ordinary men must have invoked a sense of inequality, recalling for example that moment when the founding fathers of the United States finally escaped British rule by declaring independence in 1776. Christian, who warns Bligh against being too harsh on the sailors during a

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[9] Jonathan Lamb, "Making Babies in the South Seas," *Victorian Studies* 49:3 (2007), 485.

[10] Captain Cook's Journal, 4 June 1769, http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17690604.html.

journey of 10,000 miles – for fear that the ship would become a "powder keg" – is thereby already installed as the incarnation of liberalism aboard the ship. Their struggle intensifies when Christian refuses to sign the inventory report for the ship; Bligh had earlier bought food of lower quality and had falsified the report for his own financial gain. An eruption of this tension, however, is pre-empted as they arrive in Tahiti. There, the sailors face a situation as described by Cook and his "senior scientist," Joseph Banks.[11] "A great number of the natives in their canoes came to the Ship and brought with them Cocoa-nuts," and all of them "came to us with all imaginable marks of friendship and submission."[12] In contrast to the negative depiction by Cook, who reported that "it was a hard matter to keep them out of the Ship. as [sic] they clime like Munkeys, but it was still harder to keep them from Stealing but every thing that came within their reach, in this they are prodiges expert,"[13] Banks recognized that the sailors "depended on the natives who had on all former occasions been both able and willing to supply us with any quantity of Breadfruit."[14]

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[11] Bronwen, 157. *Joseph Banks' Journal*, 28 June 1769. http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/banks/17690628.html. Banks writes: "From this place many Canoes came off to meet us and in them some very handsome women who by their behaviour seemed to be sent out to entice us to come ashore, which we most readily did, and were received in a very friendly manner by *Wiverou* who was chief of the district which was called *Owiourou*. He ordered his people to assist us in dressing our provisions, of which we had now got a tolerable stock about 30 breadfruit some plantains and fish, enough to last us two days. I stuck close to the women hoping to get a snug lodging by that means as I had often done; they were very kind, too much so for they promised more than I ask'd, but when they saw that we were resolved to stay they dropd off one by one and at last left me jilted 5 or 6 times and obliged to seek out for a lodging myself."

[12] *Captain Cook's Journal*, 13 April 1769, http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17690413.html.

[13] *Captain Cook's Journal*, 14 April 1769, http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17690414.html.

[14] *Joseph Banks' Journal*, 28 June 1769.

The same developments are depicted in *Mutiny on the Bounty*; a positive perspective , however arises from the depiction of the islanders, whose chief Hiti Hiti welcomes the captain, as other natives provide coconuts to the sailors, something they had never before seen: unfamiliar with this tropical fruit, the sailor, opening the nut and surprised to find milk in it, can but exclaim: "Milk, it's milk. Captain they must have cows here that lay eggs." In contrast to the feelings of his men, Bligh reminds us that they have travelled to Tahiti to gather breadfruits for Jamaica. Put differently, the men ought discard their belief in paradise for their sole purpose for being in the South Seas depends upon a higher calling, duty. Likewise, to punish Christian for his behaviour, Bligh forbids him to leave the ship.

The following scenes survey life on the island. We see natives cultivating, harvesting, fishing, and preparing coconuts for food, as well as women making flower necklaces, all images that thereby strengthen a sense of the exoticism of island life. The *HMS Bounty* itself becomes an expression of this exoticism when it is decorated with flowers by the natives. Hiti Hiti also explains more about life in Tahiti to Roger—as a land where the people have no need money to enjoy a fulfilled life. The chief is finally able to demand that Christian be allowed on the shores of the islands, where the English officer genuinely finds paradise, not solely in the landscape, but also with Hiti Hiti's granddaughter. They fall in love, and Christian admits, "What a contrast to the ship." Christian is ordered back to the ship by Bligh but remains on the island for one more night before swimming back. As with later movies, native songs and dances are featured. While the "native dance [can be seen as] an embodied, animated, and ephemeral social practice,"[15] it remains unfortunate "that the salvage of dance

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http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/banks/17690628.html.

[15] Valerie Weinstein, "Archiving the Ephemeral: Dance in Ethnographic Films from the Hamburg South Seas Expedition: 1908-1910," *seminar* 46:3 (2010), 224.

through the medium of film is not possible"[16] and that their depiction remains stereotypical for most spectators, who have no idea about the traditional meanings inherent in the dances we see.

More to the point, Tahiti is revealed as an island inhabited by the most beautiful women-- only be partly true, for as Cook himself described them, the women of Tahiti were from his perspective very masculine.[17] For the sailors as well as the spectators, however, beautiful and exotic women became an essential part of the South Seas and the ideal of a Tahitian island paradise. Despite the enjoyment of such a pleasant life, an end comes when Bligh commands the sailors back on board so that they might follow their duty and ship the breadfruits to Jamaica.

It comes as no surprise, however, that in order to provide these plants with sufficient water during the journey; the captain cuts the water rations of the crew. The sailors, thus, are returned to the harsh reality of life on ship. Mutiny ensues, and Christian returns to Tahiti, where he will father a child with Hiti Hiti's granddaughter. Bligh himself leads the loyal crew members to Timor and returns to hunt Christian for his betrayal. The former gathers his fellow mutineers and their wives, to sail to Pitcairn Island, where the group burns the ship and establishes a new settlement. And while parts of the depiction of the history of the mutiny were changed in the later movies, depictions of the South Seas remain largely the same.

Mutiny on the Bounty **(1962)**

The production of 1962, with Marlon Brando as Christian, Trevor Howard as Bligh, and Tarita Tumi Teripaia as the exotic beauty Maimiti[18] is perhaps the best-known version of

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[16] Ibid., 238.

[17] *Captain Cook's Journal*, 28 April 1769, http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17690428.html.

[18] She would later become Brando's third wife.

the *Bounty* plot on the screen. The conflict between Christian and Bligh here is also based on a class conflict between the captain, who has received his first command, and the nobleman Christian, who brings two ladies when he first boards, dressed as he is more like a casanova than an officer of the British Navy. Bligh also takes the chance to make some extra money by stealing cheese. In contrast to the movie of 1935, here Bligh wants to sail around South America to show his skills and gain recognition from the admiralty for the faster delivery of the breadfruits to Jamaica. However, he also has to take the route around South Africa, as the crew is unable to pass Cape Horn. They eventually arrive in Tahiti and are greeted by a joyful and promising world as it is represented by the natives, who come to the ship in their canoes.

In contrast to Hiti Hiti in the 1935version, the Tahitian chief here arrives at the shore in a large ship and is shown wearing a colourful and majestic suit of feathers. The natives are depicted as far more "primitive," for the chief does not speak English himself and is overly impressed by the Western presents. However, they agree to grant Bligh the breadfruits for his misison. After that, we see the same depictions of Tahitian life as before. Exotic fishing techniques are shown, as well as dances and traditional songs. The performance by Teripaia is famous, and made her a symbol of "exotic sex appeal" in the 1960s. After her performance, it seems only natural that Christian should fall in love with her, but the couple's first kiss is not easy, as the Tahitian woman does not know about this Western practice. Bligh needs good relations with Hiti Hiti, and consequently orders Christian to have an intimate relationship with Maimiti. In general, the sexual perspective of the Western–native interrelationship is underlined in the movie, as it is said that the Tahitians accept sex as a sign of good will. Naturally, the white sailors were also attractive because their skin colour was exotic for the Tahitians. These contacts are not imaginary: Captain Cook

also reported them. However, he also reported physical consequences that were not depicted in the movies:[19]

> Tuesday 6th This Day and for some days past we have been inform'd by several of the Natives that about 10 or 15 Months ago, Two Ships touched at this Island and stay'd 10 days in a Harbour to the Eastward calle'd Ohidea the Commanders name was Toottera so at least they call'd him and that one of the Natives / call'd Orette Brother to the Chief of Ohidea, went away with him; they likewise say that these Ship[s] brought the Venerial distemper to this Island where ^ it is now as common ~~amongst them here~~ as in any part of the World and which the ^ people bear with as little concern as if ~~it~~ ^ they had been accustom'd to it for ages past. We had not been here many days before some of our people got this disease, and as no such thing happen'd to any of the Dolphins people while she was here that I ever heard off, I had reason / notwithstanding the improbability of the thing / ~~the~~ to think that ~~some in the Endeavour had brought it here~~ we had brought it along with us which gave me no small uneasiness and I did all in my power to prevent its progress, but all I could do was to little purpose ^ for I may safely say that I was not assisted by an one person in ye Ship, and ~~I~~ was oblig'd to have the most part of the Ships Compney a Shore every day to work upon the Fort and a Strong guard every Night and the Women were so very liberal with their favours, or ~~that~~ else Nails, Shirts &C[a] were temptations that they could not Withstand, that this distemper very soon spread it self over the greatest part of ^ the Ships Compney; but now I have the satisfaction to find that the Natives all agree that we did not bring it ~~first~~ here.

Despite such possible problems, the relationship between Christian and Maimiti is depicted in the best possible way. Exotic screens, sunsets, white beaches, clear water, and palm trees further drive home the exotic nature behind the image of Tahiti.

The remainder of this iteration follows the traditional *Bounty* plot, although the mutiny is represented as more the consequence of the personal struggle between Christian and Bligh that erupts into mutiny only after a struggle over the

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[19] *Captain Cook's Journal*, 6 June 1769, http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17690606.html.

treatment of an ill sailor. After that, Christian takes over the ship and returns to Haiti and later to Pitcairn Island. Despite the same basic storyline, the 1962 *Mutiny on the Bounty* ends differently. Here, Christian thinks about returning to England to seek the decision of a court. It is his men who torch the ship to prevent his return. While trying to save the ship, the former officer is hurt and finally dies with the sinking of the ship. This ending differs from all the others, primarily because Christian cannot accept living forever in the exotic world and wants to return to civilization, although that means facing a possible death penalty. The Tahitian or South Sea paradise therefore remains something that is seen to be spectacular and peaceful for a while, but not something that could become a real home forever.

***The Bounty* (1984)**

Another approach was chosen for the 1984 version. Mel Gibson as Christian and Anthony Hopkins as Bligh are friends in the beginning, with the latter demanding that the younger man be his officer on board. The movie, however, also depicts the exoticness of the South Seas, starting with a sunset and a dawn in this setting, showing palm trees and beaches as well as the ocean in the moonlight. The movie uses a flashback as Bligh describes the events to a commission. It seems clear that Bligh, who also chose the route around Cape Horn, at first desired to achieve fame, like Cook did before him. The captain is friendly to his men at the beginning, but as the mission fails, and they have to take the longer route around Africa, first officer Fryer (Daniel Day-Lewis) is accused and demoted and Christian becomes first officer. Aside from those differences with regard to the plot, Tahiti itself remains the exotic paradise which also offers sexual freedom.

The sailors talk about the women of Tahiti, and statements like "All they wear is tattoos, in wonderful places" show that imagination about nudity, sexual openness, and exotic beauty were all parts of the common sailor image of the

South Seas. Of all three versions of the plot we look at here, nudity is shown most explicitly in *The Bounty*. The welcome by the natives is here sexually intense, with the seamen facing many near-naked Tahitian beauties who are waiting for them to come ashore. Nudity did indeed seem to be quite common in Tahiti, as Sidney Parkinson, a member of Cook's crew described it:

> we saw a favourite game, which the young girls divert themselves with in an evening dividing themselves into two parties, one standing opposite to the other, one party throws apples, which the other endeavours to catch. The right of the game I am not acquainted with; but now-and-then one of the parties advanced, stamping with their feet, making wry mouths, straddling with their legs, lifting up their cloaths, and exposing their nakedness; at the same time repeating some words in a disagreeable tone. Thus are they bred up to lewdness from their childhood, many of them not being above eight or nine years of age.[20]

Cook appears in the movie, as Chief Taina asks about him and his death, but Bligh uses the legend of the immortal Captain Cook to secure his personal situation. The chief gets a mirror as a present from King George, and in return Bligh is supposed to have sex with one of Taina's women. The dances are shown in this version of the *Bounty* plot again, and they are also sexually loaded. Another element which also seems to be the fulfilment of a stereotype is the diet of the sailors, who eat exotic fruits all the time; but fruit was not the only food on Tahiti, as Captain Cook reported:[21]

> We refused to except of the Dog as being an animal we had no use for at which she seemed a little surprised and told us that it was very good eating and we very soon had an opportunity [sic] to find that it was so, for M[r] Banks having bought a basket of fruit in which happend to be the thigh of

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[20] Sidney Parkinson, *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in His Majesty's Ship, The Endeavour.* (London, 1773), http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/parkinson/063.html.

[21] *Captain Cook's Journal*, 20 June 1769, http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/17690620.html.

> a Dog ready dress'd, of this several of us taisted and found that it was meat not to be despise'd and therefore took Obarea's dog and had him immediatly dress'd by some of the Natives in the following manner. They first made a hole in the ground about a foot deep in which they made a fire and heated some small Stones, while this was doing the Dog was Strangle'd and the hair got off by laying him frequently upon the fire, and as clean as if it had been scalded off with hot water, his intrails were taken out and the whole washed clean, and as soon as the stones and hole was sufficiently heated, the fire was put out, and part of the Stones ~~was~~ were left in the bottom of the hole, upon these stones were laid Green leaves and upon them the Dog together with the entrails, these were likewise cover'd with leaves and over them hot stones, and then the whole was close cover'd with mould; after he had laid here about 4 hours, the Oven / for so I must call it / was open'd and the Dog taken out whole and well done, and it was the opinion of every one who ~~eat~~ ^ taisted of it that they ~~n~~Never eat sweeter meat, ~~and~~ we ^ therefore resolved for the future not to despise Dogs flesh. It is in this manner that the Natives dress, or Bake all their Victuals that requires it. Flesh, Fish and fruit.

The plot continues in much the same manner as before: Christian falls in love with a native woman; however, he also adapts the cultural habits of the native population. He gets tattooed, a motif already known from O'Brien's *Atolls of the Sun* (1922), in which a white man falls in love with a native beauty and gets tattooed to become accepted by the "other" community.[22] Christian gets married to the woman, but Bligh desires to leave Tahiti to finish his mission. He starts to punish the men to keep up the discipline. Having left the island, the captain decides to sail around South America once again, but the men are no longer willing to follow his orders just to achieve his personal fame.

The mutiny begins, and Bligh has to find a way back to civilization. Christian returns to Tahiti, battling in the process against other natives who are unfriendly to intruders and kill one of his sailors. But Taina decides that they must leave, as he fears the might of the British Navy, which will demand the mutineers be punished. The journey of the

[22] Geiger, Geiger, "Imagined Islands," 99.

mutineers also ends at Pitcairn Island, and Bligh is judged not guilty for the mutiny. The image of Bligh is much more positive than in the other two movies, and Christian is driven only by his love for the Tahitian woman, not by a personal conflict with the captain. Tahiti, however, remains an "exotic anchor of freedom" in all three movies. The men are relieved from the discipline of the ship, and they experience happiness: in all three cases, it is mainly this which drives them to become mutineers.

Conclusion

Mutiny on the Bounty (1962) is probably the best known of the three movies; however, the image conveyed by all three versions is the same. Tahiti is a South Sea paradise, an exotic place where men can find happiness. All three movies use stereotypes, which might also be expected given their audiences: beautiful women, flowers, exotic plants and fruits, dances and sexual liberty are the main tropes in all three movies. Consequently they create a positive image of "otherness". Although that image is not always historically correct, as our review of Cook's reports has shown, it is exactly the image the audience expects.

The movies that show the fate of the mutineers, consequently, also establish the reproduction and chronological conservation of the stereotypes that have for generations been connected with Tahiti. Christian is always awaited by an exotic beauty, while the return to the *HMS Bounty* is always the end of the freedom that was to be experienced on shore. The antagonism between those two spheres also helps to create this positive reading or screening of Tahiti, where life seems to be simple and beautiful, and above all better than on the *HMS Bounty*. The image of an "exotic anchor of freedom" is created mainly through this bipolar depiction and the use of Western stereotypes; not by a decent look into Tahitian history and culture itself. The *Bounty* movies are indeed a sequel to the many literary works from the 18th to the 20th centuries which created a sphere of

dreams, driven above all by misinterpretations or glorifications of the South Seas as a paradise on earth.

3.
"There is More of it in Vietnam"
The Role of the Media in an Asymmetric Conflict

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Introduction

"There was more of it in Vietnam"

This phrase used by American soldiers is descriptive of the terror and the overkill of the Vietnam War. There was more firepower and there were more civil casualties than in previous military conflicts as there were 7 million tons of bombs dropped until 1975 and according to estimations, roughly 627,000 civilians lost their lives during the conflict.[1] However, these are not the only superlatives perceived during this conflict as it is considered the first war with unlimited media coverage. Thus, this war was referred to as "the television war", "the uncensored war", and the first "living-room war".[2] Despite the substance of these attributes, the medial impact on the Vietnam War is unalterable, especially because of innovations, such as the medium TV, which provided the contingency to project the horror of Vietnam in every living room around the world.

The role of the media in the Vietnam War has been discussed on various levels, which is why the state of research focuses on many different details. Those works that offer the

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[1] Bernd Greiner, *Krieg ohne Fronten. Die USA in Vietnam* (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., ²2007), 41-43; Marc Frey, "Das Scheitern des 'begrenzten Krieges': Vietnamkrieg und Indochinakonflikt," *Studies in Contemporary History* 2 (2005), 17, accessed September 4, 2015, http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2005/id=4476.

[2] Michael Mandelbaum, "Vietnam: The Television War," Daedalus 111 (4) (1982): 157-169, accessed September 10, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/ 20024822; Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); Michael Arlen, *Living-room War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

best overview on the media coverage are Wölfl's *Kriegsberichterstattung im Vietnamkrieg* from 2005 and Hallin's *The 'Uncensored War'* (1989), and Wyatt's *Paper Soldiers* (1995), focusing on the American press and how it was influenced by the government's information policy.[3] Furthermore, there is Phillip Knightley's *The First Casualty* (2004), which emphasizes on the American war correspondent and its role in the Vietnam War. Peter Braestrup's *Big Story* (1994) offers the most detailed information on the Tet coverage, by interpreting and depicting the reporting of the American press. His work is of major importance since he was in Vietnam as a correspondent for the *Washington Post* and thus, has the ability to describe many situations in more detail. To portray the Vietnamese media difficulties emerged since the research on this subject seems to have occurred either during the war or shortly afterwards. The most important works to mention are Häggman's *Propaganda und psychologische Kriegsführung der Kommunisten in Vietnam während des Krieges* (1975), Ngo-Anh's *Vietcong* (1981) as well as Pike's *Vietkong* (1968), which found consensus about the functions and goals of the Vietcong's media coverage.[4] The most remarkable works on the Vietnam War movie are Dittmar's and Michaud's *From Hanoi to*

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[3] Jan Wölfl, *Kriegsberichterstattung im Vietnamkrieg*, Krieg der Medien - Medien im Krieg 2 (Münster: Lit. Verlag, 2005); Hallin, *The "Uncensored War"*; Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[4] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television reported and interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1986 in Vietnam and Washington* (Novato: Presidio, 1994); Bertil Häggman, "Propaganda und psychologische Kriegsführung der Kommunisten in Vietnam während des Krieges," *Beiträge zur Konfliktforschung* 3 (1975), 69-97; Cuong Ngo-Anh, *Der Vietcong: Anatomie einer Streitmacht im Guerillakrieg* (München: Bernard & Graefe, 1981); Douglas Pike, *Vietkong: Organisation und Technik des revolutionären Befreiungskampfes* (München: Oldenbourg, 1968).

Hollywood (1990) and O'Nan's *Vietnam Reader* (1998).[5] The newest research does not show a certain trend, however, it does include discussion about the asymmetry in the Vietnam War. As an example Bernd Greiner's *Krieg ohne Fronten* (2007) and Frey's *Scheitern des 'begrenzten Krieges'* (2005) are to mention, both analyzing the conflict in Vietnam within the context of the asymmetric warfare debate. On the background of the role of the media in the Vietnam War Paul Gerhard published two articles, "Die aufscheinende Apokalypse des Krieges in Vietnam und der Vietnam Film als Verarbeitungsform des amerikanischen Traumas" (2006), concerning the Vietnam movie as a medium to process the events during the conflict, and "Living-Room War" (2009), portraying the importance of the medium TV. Yen Le Espiritu's essay on "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome" deals similarly with a subsequent view of how the American press handles the loss in Vietnam. Finally, Jacqueline Phinney's "And that's the way it is: The media's role in ending the Vietnam War" (2011) briefly summarizes the impact of the media coverage on the conflict in Indochina.[6]

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[5] Linda Dittmar and Michaud Gene, ed., *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Stewart O'Nan, ed., *The Vietnam Reader: The Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Nonfiction on the War* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998).
[6] Greiner, *Krieg ohne Fronten*; Frey, "Das Scheitern des 'begrenzten Krieges'"; Gerhard Paul, "Die aufscheinende Apokalypse des Krieges in Vietnam und der Vietnam Film als Verarbeitungsform des amerikanischen Traumas," In *Medien und Krieg – verhindern, dulden oder rechtfertigen?* Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte und Militärpolitik 8, ed. Lothar Schröter and Frank Schubert (Schkeuditz: Schkeuditzer Buchverlag, 2006), 91-102; Gerhard Paul², "'Living-room war': Vom exklusiven Seherlebnis zum ersten Fernsehkrieg der Geschichte," In *Bilderschlachten: 2000 Jahre Nachrichten aus dem Krieg. Technik –Medien – Kunst*, ed. Hermann Nöring, et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009): 342-49; Yen Le Espiritu, "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'fall of Saigon'," *American Quarterly* 58 (2) (2006), 329-52, accessed August 29, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068366; Jacqueline Phinney, "And that's the way it is: The media's role in ending the Vietnam War," *Dalhousie*

It is apparent that the current state of research mostly solely describes the American point of view, due to factors of accessibility and language; it logically provides a wider scope for investigation. Consequently, a unilateral perception of the media's impact on the Vietnam War is provided, which forecloses a farsightedness on the issue. In order to determine the role of the media in the Vietnam War, both the influence of the American and the Vietnamese side will be investigated and discussed until the end of Johnson's presidency. The intention behind this approach is to specify, whether the media played a role in ending this conflict, or just contributed to forming opinions on a war which just could not be won. Therefore, the medial asymmetry, meaning the imbalance which was produced by the coverage, will be portrayed and analyzed.

Hereinafter, the basis of investigation will be established by providing an overview of the most important media used during the Vietnam War. The range includes various forms of mass media, such as the print media, radio and the "new" medium TV. Afterwards, the asymmetry of media coverage will be reflected upon, particularly concerning the negative public perception, which was impelled after the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the conclusions drawn from this perception. Then, the American perception, more precisely Hollywood's perception of this asymmetric conflict will be depicted by analyzing and comparing four major Vietnam War movies produced in different periods of reappraisal. Representative for the first wave of major movies are Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), whereas *Platoon* (1986) directed by Oliver Stone and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) are exemplary for the second one. Thus, the re-processing of

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Journal of Interdisciplinary Management 7 (Spring 2011): 1-15, accessed August 21, 2015, http://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/ handle/10222/ 13827/ Phinney%20-%20And%20That%20s%20the%20 Way%20It%20Is.pdf?sequence=.

America's lost war will be set forth on the basis of this probe, especially regarding how the Americans and their opponents are portrayed.

Media Coverage of the Vietnam War

As already indicated media coverage during the Vietnam War plays an essential role in the history of war reporting and is influenced by several factors. A censorship by the U.S. government was never officially imposed, since the armed conflict arose out of a situation, in which the Americans were initially sent to South Vietnam to provide assistance. This aspect also entailed a relatively late interest in the American engagement in Vietnam.[7] Hence, the extraordinary novelty of this war was the ability for the press to report nigh on freely about the events that took place.[8] Furthermore, both the American and North Vietnamese press were driven by diverse convictions due to the discrepancy of their purpose. Adding to that, the opponent sides differ in quantity, quality, and partiality. The prominence of these aspects will be exemplified in the further, right after the spectrum of media utilized in this confrontation has been examined. Media focused on in the following ranges from the radio, the print media to the new medium TV, and film productions. First of all, the coverage of the Vietnam War in the U.S. did not remain on a consistent level throughout the conflict; therefore, an overall impression of the media used is given. Moreover, one has to distinguish between the "independent" media, meaning not directly controlled by the U.S. government, and the media used by the military to support their propaganda campaigns. Thus, the addressees for this media coverage are military service members and their families, the American and the world public. The major news agencies present in Vietnam were *AP*,

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[7] William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 2.

[8] Kristina Isabel Schwarte, *Embedded Journalists: Kriegsberichterstattung im Wandel* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2007), 13.

UPI, *Reuters* and the *Agence France Press (AFP)*, which researched for a vast amount of newspapers and TV as well as radio stations. Each of them had representatives in Vietnam, although there was only a small press corps on-site at the outset of American intervention.[9] U.S. radio and television in Vietnam were represented by six reporters for the *NBC* and *CBS* – both had around 15.000.000 viewers –, and four for the *ABC* (ca. 1.580.00 viewers). Since the amount of television sets rose to 100 million devices during the Vietnam War, *NBC*, *CBS*, and *ABC* broadcasted 184 hours on the events in Vietnam between 1965 and 1970.[10] The major newspapers on-site which reported about the war were the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post,* and the *Los Angeles Times,* joined by the journals *Time, Newsweek, U.S. News* and *World Report.* Furthermore to mention are the *Minneapolis Papers*, the *Scripps-Howard Group*, the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Wall Street Journal, the New York Daily News,* the *Baltimore Sun,* the *Washington Star,* the *Detroit News,* the *Christian Science Monitor* and *Newsday*, each represented by one reporter.[11] However, many newspapers abstained from sending their own correspondent to Vietnam and consequently had to rely on information delivered by the government or other news agencies and reporters. Since it functions as a source of information for the soldiers in Vietnam the military media the *AFVN (Armed Forces Vietnam Network)* has to be mentioned as well. The network comprises radio stations and TV stations to directly report to the active duty service members overseas.[12] The *Stars and Stripes* newspaper accounted for the press media, a newspaper which had its beginnings during the American Civil War.[13]

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[9] Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 1-2.

[10] Gerhard Paul, "'Living-room war'," 345.

[11] Wölfl, *Kriegsberichterstattung im Vietnamkrieg*, 81.

[12] Randall J. Moody, "The Armed Forces Broadcast News System: Vietnam Version," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 47(1) (1970): 28, accessed September 9, 2015, doi: 10.1177/1077699070 04700104.

[13] *Stars and Stripes*, "About Stars and Stripes," published December 7, 2015, http://www.stripes.com/ customer-service/about-us.

In contrast to the American press, which is except for the military media not directly controlled by the government, the media are utilized by the Vietcong functions as a projection surface of their ideas. Hence, what is presented in the following has to be assigned to the National Liberation Front (NLF) and their *Liberation Press Agency,* which was founded in February of 1961.[14] Consequently, the media are embedded in the propaganda organization of the Vietcong, which was introduced to address three different parties: the population and soldiers of the "liberated areas" and North Vietnam, the population and soldiers of South Vietnam and the world public. Therefore, several newspapers were solely published for the locals in Vietnamese. The most important newspaper was *Nhan Dan* (The People), because it functions as the voice for the Lao Dong Party. In addition, Hanoi released the *Quen Doi Nhan Dhan* (The People's Army) and *Thoi Noi* (The New Time). Other significant papers are *Cuu Quoc* (National Rescue), the oldest North Vietnamese newspaper, and *Lao Dong* (The Laborer).[15] Additionally, the NLF issued journals for the international audience, to justify and advocate their revolution. The most prominent ones are the quarterly issued journal *Vietnamese Studies*, with an English and a French issue. Whereas the monthly journal *Viet-Nam*, released in English, French, Chinese, Russian and Vietnamese, deals with political and cultural subjects, the *Viet-Nam Youth*, as implied by the name directly addressed a younger audience. The most significant propaganda journal for the North Vietnamese was the *Viet-Nam Courier;* it was issued every two weeks in both English and French.

Due to the fact that the new medium TV was in the ascendant the application was still costly and time-consuming, for that reason it was hardly used by the North Vietnamese to present their opinion. To compensate this issue, radio coverage had a vital role. *Radio Hanoi* or the "Voice of

[14] Ngo-Anh, *Der Vietcong*, 105.
[15] Häggman, "Propaganda und psychologische Kriegsführung," 75.

Vietnam" aimed at the people of Vietnam as well as the American soldiers and the global public. Even though the radio started as a clandestine station at the end of the 1950s, its importance grew over the following years. [16] Eleven shortwave and three medium wave transmitters sent the NLF's broadcasts throughout the world, while using nine different languages and 150 hours of broadcasting time.[17] The English broadcast included a show directly geared to the American soldiers, *Hanoi Hannah,* which played 30 minutes every day.[18] With her paroles she tried to break the morale of the opposing soldiers:

> American GIs don't fight this unjust immoral and illegal war of Johnson's. Get out of Vietnam now and alive. This is the voice of Vietnam Broadcasting from Hanoi, capitol of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Our program for American GIs can be heard at 1630 hours. (Hanoi Hannah, 12 August 1967)[19]

Moreover, the North Vietnamese also produced several movies, mostly documentaries, supporting the propaganda for foreign countries. Up until 1963 already 91 movies were produced and the number grew steadily.[20]
After listing the media both opponents employed, it is inevitable to examine how the asymmetry between these two parties emerged. Through differences in motivation, firepower and troop structure, the Vietnam conflict itself showed signs of asymmetry; this imbalance is portrayed by the media in different ways. In order to present the discrepancies evolved, the press coverage on the Tet Offensive serves as an example.

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[16] Willi A. Boelcke, *Die Macht des Radios: Weltpolitik und Auslandsrundfunk 1924-1976* (Darmstadt: Ullstein Verlag, 1977), 548.
[17] Häggman, "Propaganda und psychologische Kriegsführung," 76.
[18] Ngo-Anh, *Der Vietcong,* 166.
[19] Don North, "The Search for Hanoi Hannah," Viet Nam Generation Inc. 1991, accessed September 30, 2015, http://www.psywarrior.com/hannah.html.
[20] Häggman, "Propaganda und psychologische Kriegsführung," 77.

The media coverage during the Vietnam War, especially the American attitude towards it, changes significantly during the conflict, because the political background changed as well. For instance, since the war lasted for a comparatively long time, the media were influenced by three different administrations. Due to the fact that there has not been an official declaration of war, the American government did not have a reason to justify a censorship on the media coverage. This, however, does not imply that the correspondents had the ability to do as they pleased. They had to confer with their editors − and even more importantly had to make sure not to offend the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), led by General William Westmoreland (1914 – 2005), as they had to be approved by them.[21] The process to receive this accreditation was fairly easy. As soon as the correspondents obtained a visa they had to submit a letter to the MACV, in which the newspaper states to take "full responsibilities for [their] professional actions, including financial responsibility and personal conduct as they affect [their] professional action".[22] Free-lancers had to deliver two letters of different organizations, in order to proof the coverage of costs. After managing these steps the correspondents received an accreditation card, which stated that

> [t]he bearer of this card should be accorded full co-operation and assistance … to assure the successful completion of his mission. Bearer is authorized rations and quarters on a reimbursable basis. Upon presentation of this card, the bearer is entitled to air, water and ground transportation under a priority of 3.[23]

Since the constraints on the media coverage were minor, due to the reasons already mentioned, it could be expected that the American correspondents in Vietnam used

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[21] Wölfl, *Kriegsberichterstattung im Vietnamkrieg*, 82.
[22] Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 142.
[23] "MACV," 1966, Office of Information, Correspondent Accreditation Files, boxes 15-22, RG 334-74-593, Adjutant General's Office, Department of the Army, Washington National Records Center.

this opportunity to report as freely and truthfully as possible about the events in Vietnam. The only presses impaired by censorship were the newspaper *Stars and Stripes* and the *Armed Forces Vietnam Network*, which primarily addressed the troops.[24] Thus, the press had to sign a commitment to respect a few rules concerning the release of information, whether it is classified or not.[25] For instance, the press cannot publish "future plans, operations, or strikes …, exact number and type or identification of casualties suffered by friendly units,… [or] tactical specifics, such as altitudes, course, speeds, or angle of attack".[26]

On the contrary, the North Vietnamese did not need any sort of accreditation out of several reasons. First of all, their media were domestic and controlled by the NLF, consequently there were no freelance reporters or correspondents sent by foreign press agencies, who needed to be accredited. Furthermore, the NLF put emphasis on being considered as a member of the world diplomacy, therefore, they sent representatives to international meetings to act in place of both South and North Vietnam.[27] In 1970, the *Vietnam Courier* stated that the NLF maintained diplomatic relations with 25 countries, such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Iraq.[28] Thereby, they consider themselves superior to the South Vietnamese government and did not have to follow any of the set regulations. Consequently, they did not have to give account of which information they are releasing, or the substance of this information. For instance, casualties,

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[24] Edwin Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 547.
[25] Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 159-160.
[26] "Memorandum for Correspondents: Rules Governing Public Release of Military Information in Vietnam," October 31, 1966, Disaccreditation File, MACV Office for Information, box 14, RG 334-74-593, Adjutant General's Office, Department of the Army, Washington National Records Center.
[27] Pike, *Vietkong: Organisation und Technik des revolutionären Befreiungskampfes*, 214.
[28] Häggman, "Propaganda und psychologische Kriegsführung," 95.

troop movement, and battle outcomes are no longer classified information, but details that can be used to the disfavor of their opponent. As a result, the Vietcong were able to regulate information in order to represent a picture of the Vietnam War that was favorable for them. Moreover, since the NLF's press was already on-site, indigenous, and stronger connected to the Vietnamese people, they had an advantage over the American correspondents, who had to find ways to receive credible and presentable information. Resulting, the NLF has a tactical asset over the U.S., because they had the entire surveillance and control of their media. This aspect will be further illustrated in the media coverage of the Tet Offensive in the following.

Despite the possibility for a relatively open coverage throughout the war, the American media did not take the opportunity to report as freely as they could have and as soon as they should have. Engaged with the cold war and influenced by Kennedy's information policy, most American media forfeited the chance to provide a seamless coverage on the Vietnam War. Those correspondents who did try to deliver a continuous and reliable report were challenged with restricted, wrong or propagandistic information.[29] Relating to this subject, Hallin applies the concept of *objective journalism*, which generally describes a form of coverage that lives of the facts that are presented and that the journalist abstains from subjectivity, personal opinion or judgement.[30] However, the American media has the best requisite to not remain objective in political affairs, as it is independent of the government's influence. Freedom of press is not only rooted in the constitution, but also provided since most media agency is owned by private persons.[31] As already stated, the American press during the Vietnam War did not take up the full extent of their abilities to transport a critical coverage of this military

[29] Schwarte, *Embedded Journalists*, 15.
[30] Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 68.
[31] Ibid., 64.

conflict. Superficially, a divergence from the objective journalism can be portrayed during the Vietnam War, but investigating this aspect on a deeper scale it becomes apparent that the media rather abstained from forming an actual opposition.[32] On the one hand, John F. Kennedy (1917 – 1963), one of the most favored presidents, knew how to use the media in his favor and thus, understood to pull the strings in the background. His speech in front of the American Newspaper Publisher's Association promoted a silent solidarity or secrecy from the journalist, in order to stand united against a common enemy:

> The very word "secrecy" is repugnant in a free and open society; and we are as a people inherently and historically opposed to secret societies, to secret oaths and to secret proceedings. We decided long ago that the dangers of excessive and unwarranted concealment of pertinent facts far outweighed the dangers which are cited to justify it … But I do ask every publisher, every editor, and every newsman in the nation to reexamine his own standards, and to recognize the nature of our country's peril. In time of war, the government and the press have customarily joined in an effort, based largely on self-discipline, to prevent unauthorized disclosures to the enemy. In time of "clear and present danger," the courts have held that even the privileged rights of the First Amendment must yield to the public's need for national security.[33]

After the speech, it seems that the American press was divided into two fractions. Those loyal to the government and the press corps on-site in Vietnam, who perceived what was going on and noticed that the American involvement slowly

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[32] Daniel C. Hallin², "The Media, the War in Vietnam, and Political Support: A Critique of the Thesis of an Oppositional Media," *The Journal of Politics* 46 (1) 1984). 11, accessed August 8, 2015, doi: 10.2307/2130432.
[33] Kennedy, John F: "Address 'The President and the Press' Before the American Newspaper Publisher Association, New York City," April 27, 1961. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project,* accessed September 28, 2015, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8093.

but steadily turned into a war.[34] With the change of government, a change of the attitude towards the media was inevitable, especially since the conflict escalated incessantly under Lyndon B. Johnson. The new President, who hoped to pursue with the same information policy his predecessor used, was not successful with this attempt. Instead of cooperating with the media, he tried to deliver them false information to influence them towards his opinion. Consequently, an increase of the credibility gap, meaning the loss of plausibility, was unavoidable.[35] By trying to direct which information should be released they tried to use the correspondents in Vietnam as a means to an end.[36]With the increasing proliferation of the war while Lyndon B. Johnson (1908 – 1973) was president, the media presence in Vietnam grew from a small corps of correspondent, reaching its peak in 1968 with 464 accredited correspondents in Vietnam, although it has to be taken into account that only 60 of them were considered "fact-finding" and actually delivered information to an American audience.[37]

Contrary to the U.S., the North Vietnamese did not have to face these difficulties, since their information policy has mostly remained the same throughout the Vietnam War and because this policy was formed for a special purpose. With their excessive propaganda attempt, they directly addressed the countries abroad in order to receive support for their revolution, reduce the empathy towards South Vietnam, and to impair the perception of the U.S. involvement in

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[34] Wölfl, *Kriegsberichterstattung im Vietnamkrieg*, 58.
[35] Ibid., 77-78.
[36] Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 411.
[37] "Press List: Correspondents accredited by the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, April 1, 196," *Big Story: How the American Press and Television reported and interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1986 in Vietnam and Washington*, Vol.2 ed. Peter Braestrup (Colorado: Westview, 1977), 245-54; Braestrup, *Big Story*, 10; Steve Hallock, *The press march to war: Newspapers set the stage for military intervention in Post-World War II America*, Mediating American History 10 (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 103-104.

Vietnam.[38] The importance of the propaganda campaign abroad was stressed in an article in *Nhan Dan*: "The more our just struggle wins the support of the people of the world, the better able we will be to demand the implementation of the Geneva Accords, including the most important clause, on reunification."[39] Thus, following their set idea of media coverage and foreign diplomacy the North Vietnamese were not in the unfavorable situation that they had to adjust to current political events, just like the American press had to. Even beyond that, it was easier for the North Vietnamese to manipulate the media to reach their goals as they are not under public pressure, such as the Americans who had to uphold the impression of a fair, democratic, and just nation.

The coverage of the Tet Offensive introduces a mood swing in the American media coverage and more importantly, it changes the public opinion of the war in Vietnam. This event shows asymmetry in many factors. First of all, the battle itself, as it was a surprise attack by the Vietcong who used the ceasefire over Tet, the celebration of the lunar New Year to attack their enemies.[40] Furthermore, the overall asymmetry was determined by troop numbers, firepower, and motivation. With its launch in the night of January 31, 1968 a long fight between the Vietcong on one side and the South Vietnamese supported by the Americans on the other side broke out.[41] The Tet Offensive was considered "a 'last gasp,' a failed all or nothing bid to win the Vietnam War on the ground, which, tough stymied in the field, succeeded, largely by accident, in

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[38] Rolph Hammond, and Rodger Swearingen, *Communism in Vietnam: A Documentary Study of Theory, Strategy and Operational Practices* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 1967), 130.
[39] Robert K. Brigham, *Guerilla diplomacy: The NLF's foreign relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 17.
[40] This cease-fire was agreed upon for several years already, as it is an important holiday for the Vietnamese. A condition the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese used hoping that their enemies were not ready to counter their offensive; Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 180-181.
[41] Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 109.

persuading America to throw away the fruits of a major allied victory and start down the road to defeat and humiliation."[42] The portrayal of Tet in the media, however, showed a different reception, because de-facto a victory for the Americans and South Vietnamese the offensive showed that the two allies are not superior to the Vietcong like the American media and the president lead to believe. This can be directly depicted by looking at the reactions on the Tet Offensive in the news.

To begin with the peculiarities of the Tet Offensive have to be stated, since the conditions the American correspondents had to face, had an impact on the immediate coverage of this battle. Although, the number of accredited correspondents was the highest in 1968, there were not enough researching reporters to cover the surprise attack. Consequently, stories on the alleged occupation of the U.S. embassy in Saigon prevailed during the early reports of the Tet Offensive, as "(1) it was American, (2) it was close at hand, and (3) it was dramatic."[43] In addition to the lack of personnel to cover the events, other difficulties restricted the possibility of an exact and sudden coverage. Logistically the American press corps was too unstable in order to cope with the circumstances the attack exerted. The communication system disintegrated due to an overload of the phone system, which made it difficult for the correspondents to communicate, to receive, and to confirm information. It was not only hard to exchange news within Vietnam, but also to deliver new stories abroad, due to the outage of air traffic on the outset of the offensive, and the dependence of some news organizations on a dissatisfying wire. Taking all of these factors into account, it becomes obvious that the competing journalists put emphasis on exceling each other to issue new reports. Furthermore, it has to be stated that "[t]he Tet

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[42] Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head, introduction to *The Tet Offensive*, by Marc Jason Gilbert, and William Head (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 1.
[43] Braestrup, *Big Story*, 118.

Offensive was the war in microcosm – superior American firepower against superior North Vietnamese political will." Thus, the weeks during the Tet Offensive also mirrored the relationship the American press had with the U.S. government since the conflict started, and especially under President Johnson.[44]

Now, it is time to take a closer look on the newspaper coverage of the Tet Offensive. Through the above described haste, the reporters were rushed to issue a story on the attack, therefore, the first American reports of the offensive showed a distorted image of the actual events. For instance, the fight at the U.S. embassy was presented more dramatically, because *AP* as well as *UPI* simply did not have or use the time to verify the information by the military police that also did not exactly see the fight happening. Since the newspaper reporter in Saigon knew, that the U.S. will soon be informed through the wire services, they felt compelled to make a move. Consequently, most stories were written in a great haste, with sparse information, and published before an official report on the events was released.[45] On the outset of the Tet Offensive, a group of 19 Vietcong attacked the U.S. Embassy in Saigon that was poorly guarded. By bombing it – the wall was holed – the Vietcong were able to attack the front of the building, and tried to invade. Six hours later, the fight in the compound was over and the Vietcong were dead.[46] The American newspapers reported about the event in Vietnam:

The *New York Times*' headline on January 30th was more than an overemphasis of the events: "Vietcong Attack 7 Cities; Allies Call Off Tet Truce." Tom Buckley, who wrote the article presented the information rather vaguely as he reported that "Vietcong raiders drove into the center of seven major Vietnamese cities … burning Government buildings, freeing prisoners from provincial jails and blasting military

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[44] Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 183-184; Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 412.
[45] Braestrup, *Big Story*, 92.
[46] Ibid., 75.

installations and airfields with rockets and mortars."[47] In the Late City edition of the *New York Times* on January 31st, the attack on the U.S. embassy in Saigon was thematized, however, it remained unclear whether the Vietcong invaded the building or just attacked it. Charles Mohr wrote that "[m]any details of the embassy battle were unclear for the time being, even though newsmen ran crouching with military policemen when the grounds were retaken." This statement comprises both problems of the coverage on the attack of the embassy. The information provided was uncertain, which consequently lead to wondering whether the embassy really had to be "retaken." Under Buckley's headline "Foe invades U.S. Saigon embassy raiders wiped out after 6 hours Vietcong widen attack on cities," he presented the fight involving the embassy. He also indicates that "[e]leven hours later, only fragmentary reports could be obtained of many of the guerrillas' assaults that turned Saigon, a relatively secure island in a widening sea of war for the past two-and-a-half years, into a battleground." Therefore, the *New York Times* reporters truthfully admitted that the information provided is doubtful and ambiguous − an aspect neglected by many wire services.[48]

The *Washington Post*'s first story on the occurrences in Vietnam was a rewrite from the wire services titled: "Vietcong seize part of U.S. embassy – Building retaken in fight." It was maintained that "[p]arts of the building had been held by the enemy for six hours … [including] part of the first floor of the building itself." The first reworked edition had the same title but conceded that not the building but the embassy complex was seized. The last edition completed at two o'clock in the morning Eastern Time declared under the title "Vietcong

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[47] Tom Buckly, "Vietcong Attack 7 Cities; Allies Call of Tet Truce," *The New York Times,* January 30, 1968.
[48] Charles Mohr, "Foe Invades U.S. Saigon Embassy," *The New York Times,* January 31, 1968; Braestrup, *Big Story*, 98.

invade U.S. embassy – assault crushed by GIs" that the "fight raged in the garden of the embassy compound."[49]

However, it is remarkable that both the *Times* and the *Post* managed to cover the attack on the embassy more precisely than most wire services, although they were slowed down by various factors. Striking about both reports is that Westmoreland's interview was not taken into account, even though *CBS News* aired it on January 31st as a special report. The newspapers coincided on most accounts, such as the dilatoriness of the troops in Saigon, but showed a discrepancy concerning the severity of the attack in Da Nang, or the substance of the information delivered.[50]

This story prevailed on TV, in the press, and the wire services, because "[t]he 'terrorist-proof' embassy was 'symbolic' …, the battle was dramatic (Colonel Jacobsen was good copy), and, most important, the newsmen were around to watch the action (or part of it)." Not to forget, the story was spectacular and thus, sold well, an aspect which cannot be neglected when talking about the press. Although they function as a medium of information, newspapers also have their focus on the finances, which influences the nature of media coverage. Considering this aspect, the reports of both the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* have a far more patriotic tone, than perceived in the *Post* and the *Times*. Moreover, a Cold War mentality can be observed by looking at their headlines. The *L.A. Times* wrote on January 30th, 1968: "Reds open up. Da Nang, 7 capitals attacked. Allies cancel cease-fire as communists start offensive." [51] The Chicago Tribune asserts: "Recapture U.S. Embassy. GIs land in copters on Saigon roof, wipe out Viet Cong in 6-hour battle. Reds blast hole in wall to gain entry." [52] Not only the

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[49] "Vietcong Seize Part of the U.S. Embassy," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 1968; Braestrup, *Big Story*, 103-104.
[50] Braestrup, *Big Story*, 107-108.
[51] AP, "Reds Open Up: Da Nang, 7 Capitals Attacked," *Los Angeles times*, January 30, 1968.
[52] "Recapture U.S. Embassy," *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1968.

terminology is distinctively different from that of the other reports in the *Times* and the *Post*, but also the tone the reporters used. The accounts are not geared towards a neutral and informative coverage, but show a rather sensationalist approach. Both articles talk about communist attacks that were "wiped out" by American GIs. On top of it, the *L.A. Times* provide a picture which shows a marine with the caption "beleaguered Khe Sanh – A lone U.S. marine, center, [and] stands atop sandbags that protect huts at Khe Sanh."[53] Thus, the Tet Offensive and the fight at the embassy are presented in a very drastic way, as a devious attack on the American and South Vietnamese. The fact that the Vietnam War, and especially the U.S. involvement in this conflict degenerated a while ago seems of no importance.

Naturally, the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, which directly wrote for the American GIs, reported the events in a different manner. According to their report on February 1st "Viet Cong forces launched heavy attacks against Saigon" and that "Guerillas fought their way into the U.S. Embassy and occupied five floors of it for several hours." This aspect has already been proven to be false, since the Vietcong were not able to invade the building. Moreover, it is stated that "Helicopters dropped troops onto a roof-top pad to help rout the Communist suicide squad."[54] In contrast to this, Braestrup describes the same event as follows: "One by one, the sappers died in the yard. After sunrise, MPs rushed the gate, ending the fight, just as a platoon of airborne troops landed by helicopter on the chancery roof to ensure the embassy's security."[55] Thus, the attack on the embassy was not presented as the six hour battle on the compound that it was, but as a fierce fight, during which the Vietcong invaded the building and had to be chased out by American troops. Two

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[53] *The Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1968.
[54] UPI, "VC Hit Saigon. Red Invade Embassy, Air Base," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Vol.24, No.31, February 1, 1968.
[55] Braestrup, *Big Story*, 75.

days later, the headline of the newspaper reports: "Red Death Toll for 3 days: 10,553." The matching article proffers that the Vietcong were not able to upscale their impact, which therefore implies, that the Tet Offensive proved to be a failure for Hanoi.[56]

Since the asymmetry of the coverage shall be presented, it is now striking to reflect the NLF's press coverage on the Tet Offensive. The *Vietnam Courier*, the weekly published newspaper, directly addresses foreign countries and is therefore the best example to portray the desired perception of the offensive outside of Vietnam. Five days after the launch of the attack, the newspaper offered a positive summary of its alleged result by delivering the headline: "The whole of South Viet Nam in effervescence." Thus, the major successes are that "[i]n 3 days, Saigon, Da Nang, Hue, 60 other urban centers and more than 20 U.S. and puppet bases [were] attacked," which led to "successive uprisings of the urban and rural populations" and to the fact that "[t]he People's Forces control many cities and towns including Hue, Nha Trang, Da Lat, Ben Tre and Saigon main wards." [57] In their next issue, these achievements were numbered, stating that "50,000 Enemies, including 10,000 Yankees, killed, wounded or captured" and "200,000 Soldiers of [the] puppet army routed."[58] It is needless to say that those results are utopian, since the Americans and the South Vietnamese technically sustained fewer casualties. Hammond and Swearingen, however, referred to the reason why the NLF's information policy still had an influence on the notion of the Tet Offensive: "North Vietnam pursues its course with a rigidly austere determination born of confidence in its excellent political organization, in the fighting qualities of its army, and in the 'immutable' laws of history and of

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[56] UPI, "Red Death Toll for 3 Days: 10,553," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Vol.24, No.33, February 3, 1968.
[57] *Vietnam Courier*, No.149, February 5, 1968.
[58] *Vietnam Courier*, No.150, February 10, 1968.

revolutionary war, buoyed by hope that disunity and frustration in the United States will undermine the American effort."[59] Moreover, the NLF's diplomatic groundwork laid the basis for a successful completion of the offensive, since it did not only weaken the South Vietnamese government but also guaranteed that both Saigon and the U.S. troops were not primed for the attack.[60]

Concluding, what does the snapshot of the Tet coverage comprise and effect and moreover, how do these findings compare to the actual outcome of the offensive? The Vietcong's charge on South Vietnam and the Americans and the consequent press coverage on the events contributed to a sustainable change on the perception of the war throughout the U.S. and the world. Therefore, a change of mood towards the war was inevitable, which especially derived from the inability of the U.S. government to generate a euphoric sentiment about the involvement in Vietnam. One reason for this development is the new medium TV and the inexperience with its effects. Considering that from 1965 until 1970 out of 2,300 reports only 76 actual showed combat operations, and thus the depiction of the American soldiers were rather heroic and Hollywood-like, it is not surprising that the coverage of the Tet Offensive lead to a confusion in the USA. Hanoi's attack clearly showed the shocking reality of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, that it was indeed a war. [61] Consequently, the Vietcong's charge is remembered as the starting point of battered morale among the American citizens and it does reveal the importance of the media. According to David Halberstam, "[i]t was the first time in history a war had been declared over by an anchorman," hinting at significance of Cronkite's report on the events in Vietnam. Although, the offensive is portrayed as a "disastrous turn of events," the

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[59] Hammond and Swearingen, *Communism in Vietnam*, 185.
[60] Brigham, *Guerilla diplomacy*, 74.
[61] Mira Beham, *Kriegstrommeln: Medien, Krieg und Politik* (München: Dtv, 1996), 86-89.

influence on America's public opinion is more intricate and not as sweeping.[62] One can rather assess the attack's aftermath as the inception for the already formed opposition to raise their voice. Lastly, whether the Tet Offensive was a victory or a loss for the U.S. was not the most important issue, because regardless of the result the war was simply not under control. Moreover, the palm they bore was a pyrrhic victory, the price they paid for the involvement in Vietnam was simply too high.[63]

In a secret North Vietnam politburo cable the effects the Vietcong wanted and did achieve with their information policy are clearly named:

> As a result of our massive victories in all areas, military, political, and diplomatic, especially the victories we won in the general offensive and uprisings during the Tet Lunar New Year, the situation on the battlefield in South Vietnam and the situation in the U.S. and throughout the world is developing in directions that are very favorable to us and very unfavorable for the enemy. Because of major political, social, and economic problems, because of the ferocious struggles going on within American leadership circles, especially during the primary elections in the U.S., and because of powerful pressure from world public opinion and from U.S. public opinion, Johnson has been forced to "restrict the bombing" of North Vietnam.[64]

With the severity of the Tet Offensive being an unpleased surprise, both the press coverage and the prevalent political and military shortcomings lead to an establishment of an Anti-war movement in the USA. Although, the media alone cannot be faulted for the rejection of Johnson's policy, it had a large share by contributing to the widening of the credibility gap.

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[62] Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 168.

[63] Ibid., 170-173.

[64] "Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable," April 03, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Party Central Committee, Hanoi. Translated for CWIHP by Merle Pribbenow, accessed September 30, 2015, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113977.

Therefore, public opinion resulted to be the "essential domino" which eventuated in the downfall of the Johnson administration and ultimately the loss of support for the Vietnam War itself.[65]

From Vietnam to Hollywood

In the following part of the chapter, the perception of the Vietnam War in the American cinema will be discussed by looking at four highly representative war films: *The Deer Hunter, Apocalypse Now, Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*. Movies and war have a strong and complex connection. Therefore, movies function as a medial sounding board, and with analyzing them, one cannot only gain insight on the actuality of an historic event, but also receive an impression of the political and temporal context the movie is embedded in.[66] The genre these movies are assigned to had its beginnings in 1915 with the release of the *Birth of a Nation,* a movie which unifies themes and motifs that are still copied and reused today, such as marching armies, horrifying pictures of casualties, and the creation of an heroic protagonist. [67] By adding *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) as an example of the subsequent movies, it becomes apparent that war films can either depict a pro- or an anti-war position, or alternatively both at the same time. This movie delivers a highly pacifistic message to the audience, since it revolves around the futility of the positional warfare in the First World War. The images depicted neither reflect a pride to serve for one's country, nor are they glorious or heroic. In the course of time the genre developed steadily towards a vehicle to mirror criticism, as well as approval of past or present political events. In contrast to the Second World War in which the Americans functioned as the "savior" of Europe, contributing

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[65] Wölfl, *Kriegsberichterstattung im Vietnamkrieg*, 112-113.

[66] Waltraud >Wara< Wende, *Filme, die Geschichte(n) erzählen: Filmanalyse als Medienkulturanalyse* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 112.

[67] Albert Auster and Quart Leonard, *How the war was remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 2.

tremendously to defeat the Nazi regime, the public perception of the American intervention in Vietnam was rather negative. As Michael Ryan and Douglas Keller remarked, "Hollywood military movies of the seventies and eighties need to be read, first, in the context of the 'post-Vietnam syndrome,' which was characterized by the desire of withdrawal from 'foreign involvement' after the debacle in Vietnam and epitomized by the Clark Amendment forbidding intervention in Angola."[68] Thus, by scrutinizing the movies in the following it can be ascertained whether Hollywood remained with this trend or whether a more critical approach is used in order to depict the public American opinion and the digestion of this doubtful operation.

Even though the audiovisual media improved throughout the Vietnam War, it is remarkable that Hollywood completely discounted productions on this subject until 1973 when *The Green Berets* was released. However, this movie did not contain any sort of criticism it solely vindicates the U.S. intervention. Therefore, the overall impression is that "[t]he American soldiers are tough, gutsy, and heroic, the South Vietnamese incompetents and victims, the Communists vicious, good only for cannon fodder."[69] It seems that this theme prevailed and that Hollywood did not dare to release a movie which criticizes it directly as it still lasted. *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* both show a rather heroic depiction of the American troops in combat and contrasting an evil and vicious one of the Vietcong as the stereotypic enemy. Despite of this portrayal, the horror of Vietnam prevails as a constant companion.

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[68] Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, "From *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*," In *Movies and American Society*, ed. Steven J. Ross (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 282; Yen Le Espiritu, "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome," 331.

[69] Stewart O'Nan, "First Wave of Major Films," In *The Vietnam Reader: The Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Nonfiction on the War*, ed. Stewart O'Nan (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 259.

The Deer Hunter emerged as the first movie which was directly related to the Vietnam War, although the production of *Apocalypse Now* had already started before. With its tripartite structure, Cimino's work shows the journey of a group of three friends who leave from their hometown Clairton in Pennsylvania to fight in the Vietnam War and their struggle after ending their duty there. Michael (Robert de Niro), Nick (Christopher Walkin), and Steven (John Savage) and their community are of Eastern European origin, which is especially striking considering the cold war background of the intervention in Vietnam. Nevertheless, those three − and above all Michael − represent the stereotypic American soldier. By dividing the story into three parts, the audience has the possibility to perceive the direct effect of the war on a small group who already had their problems before joining the military. The other movies presented do not share this back-story although they involve a collective as well. Their members were foregathered not by friendship but through the brotherhood of the military. Instead of just showing a glance of the community's life, the events are described very detailed, such as Steven's wedding and the deer hunt the group undertakes.[70] The sudden transition from Clairton to Vietnam appears to be as rapidly and dramatically as the rupture the soldiers must have experienced as they found themselves fighting in the war: napalm, flamethrowers, and death set the tone of the first images of the war and the impression persists as the three friends, who recently reunited, are held captive by the Vietcong. The following scenes expose the most horrific moments of this movie, since it does not concentrate on the guerilla war and overwhelming American firepower, but on the personal drama of this group. The Vietcong force their prisoners to play Russian roulette against each other, once again a portrayal of the malicious enemy, who is entertained by their ailing captives. Nick accomplishes to liberate the friends, thereupon the group is separated, and each member is

[70] O'Nan, "First Wave of Major Films," 262.

left to his own fate. Consequently, *The Deer Hunter* shows the long term impact on veterans by exemplifying it on Michael, who survived the war without any visible injuries, but still struggles to integrate into his old community, Nick, who suffered from PTSD, remained in Vietnam and continued to risk his life playing Russian roulette, and at last Steven, who lost his legs in the war and was not willing to return to his wife. In contrast to the other movies, Cimino's work mainly concentrates on the emotional effect of the war rather than the military importance, an aspect also shared by *Apocalypse Now* discussed in the following.

Therefore, it appears that Vietnam merely functions as a mirror which reflects more serious obscurities than just political ones. "The veteran protagonist struggles to interpret and understand what Vietnam has come to represent, struggles to interpret its mystery, and America perhaps more than Vietnam is the landscape against which the cost of his failure of interpretation indelibly etched."[71] The particularity about *The Deer Hunter* is especially the representation of the veteran's strain. As Michael returns to his home town without knowing what happened to his friends, he is not even willing to go to his own homecoming party. The only person he opens up to is Linda (Meryl Streep), Nick's girlfriend, who he already fancied before they left to go to Vietnam. Through talking to her, he finds out that Nick went AWOL.[72] As Linda asks him about his wounds, he replies: "It was nothin'. Just the usual complications,"[73] and he tries to cover the fact that the war also left marks on him. This aspect is stressed later on when he states: "Linda, I just want to say how sorry I am about Nick. And how, I know how much you loved him and

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[71] Kevin Bowen, "'Strange Hells': Hollywood on Search of America's Lost War," In *From Hanoi to Hollywood. The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar and Michaud Gene (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 231.

[72] Military acronym: absent without official leave.

[73] Barry Spikings, *The Deer Hunter*. Film. Directed by Michael Cimino. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 1978.

… I know that it'll never be the same."[74] Not only does this show the impact Vietnam had on the soldiers, but also the mental overload that the families at home had to deal with. This is most of all noticeable looking at Steven's family. He returned from the war as an amputee, so he decides to stay in a veteran's hospital, leaving his depressed wife in town because he thought he does not fit in anymore.

Not only the family relations change, but also the dynamics within the group of friends. For instance, the deer hunt the group participates in takes on more drastic traits, as the group reunites for this activity, after Michael comes home. What is striking is that Michael, who beforehand was the best shooter of the group, is now not able to shoot the deer having lived through the horror of Vietnam. The situation escalates when Stan (John Cazale) points his gun at the friends, whereupon Michael, who remembers the Russian roulette tragedy during their captivity, loses his mind. He empties the cylinder except for one round, spins it before engaging it, holds the gun to Stan's temple and pulls the trigger. However, not only Michael suffers from this condition. Nick, who does not even return to the U.S., is driven into madness and is found playing Russian roulette in the jungle of Vietnam, while Saigon is falling. The tragic end of this movie was Nick's death during the game of Russian roulette, he was challenged to by Michael in order to convince him to come back home.

Finally, can *The Deer Hunter* be evaluated as a prowar or an anti-war movie? Cimino's film combines both positions to some extent. As shown, the movie clearly criticizes the handling of the veteran situation, the psychological strain and horror of war. Moreover, to be representative for a prowar movie, the depiction of the war is not significant enough, since combat situations are reduced to a minimum. As the movie was released, it was considered as pro-war and idealistic for the American hero who returns home after successfully saving his friends' life. In fact, Cimino's criticism is more

[74] Ibid.

profound, above all looking at the home the three friends are supposed to return to. The pathetic picture of the American home front that is determined by alcoholism, violence towards women, broken relationships, and feigned piety is presented with all its harshness.[75]

Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* shares certain features with *The Deer Hunter*, especially concerning the emotional impact of war. Nevertheless, it also sets a major focus on the military aspect of this war. Based on Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness,* it remained as one of the most significant movies on the Vietnam War. The picture painted prods to an ambiguity which runs through the movie like a common thread. "For instance, the title, Apocalypse Now, seems to emphasize the destructive, prowar side of the film, derived as it was from the antiwar slogan 'Peace Now!' Yet it is also possible that the title is an ironic warning of the ultimate dangers of extended conflict."[76] The movie lives of exaggeration, violence, and insanity, but at the same time it portrays mental illness, weakness, and fear. Through this ambiguous depiction, one constantly wonders about the message the film conveys, and whether it is pro- or anti-war. The opening sequence sets the tone for this movie: Napalm bombs are dropping on the Vietnamese jungle while the Doors' song "The End" is playing. The picture changes and shows Cpt. Benjamin L. Willard (Martin Sheen) in his hotel room in Saigon reflecting upon the damages the war had on his life:

> Saigon. Shit. I'm still only in Saigon. Every time, I think I'm going to wake up back in the jungle. When I was home after my first tour, it was worse. I'd wake up, and there'd be nothing. I hardly said a word to my wife, until I said yes to a

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[75] Burkhard Röwekamp, *Antikriegsfilm: Zur Ästhetik, Geschichte und Theorie einer filmhistorischen Praxis* (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2011), 145.
[76] Frank P. Tomasulo, "The politics of ambivalence: Apocalypse Now as prowar and antiwar film," In *From Hanoi to Hollywood. The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar and Michaud Gene (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 149.

> divorce. When I was here, I wanted to be there. When I was there, all I could think of was getting back into the jungle. I'm here a week now … waiting for a mission, getting softer. Every minute I stay in this room, I get weaker.[77]

As soldiers pick him up for the mission he is waiting for they find him disoriented, drunk, and covered in blood, just a hint of the insanity to expect. Willard is sent on a mission to terminate Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando), a highly decorated Colonel, who apparently lost track of his command and is about to be arrested for murder. While following the Captain on his operation, Coppola leads the audience deeper into the jungle and the horror of Vietnam. As Willard begins his trip, he receives help from the U.S. navy and the air cavalry. Thus, the immense firepower of the U.S. military is portrayed with helicopters, tanks, boats, and ocean tanks; there is nothing the superpower does not have. Coppola even criticizes the media itself by showing a camera team[78] which tells the soldiers "keep moving don't look at the camera. Just go by like you're fighting. It's for television. Just go through," and thereby showing that the media representatives are trying to provide impressive pictures.[79] Seizing on the common theme, Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall) is introduced, a Lieutenant Colonel who helps to bring Willard downriver. He is leading the 1st Cavalry Division and is the perfect example for both intrepidity and madness. For instance, he throws play cards with the company emblem on the dead Vietnamese bodies. On asking what he is doing, the Lieutenant answers: "Death cards. Lets Charlie know who did this."[80] Although he clearly opposes himself to the enemy by this action he also shows appreciation of their will to combat: "Any man

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[77] Francis Ford Coppola, *Apocalypse Now*. Film. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Beverly Hills: United Artists, 1979.

[78] Coppola himself has a cameo appearance, playing the correspondent who instructs the soldiers.

[79] *Apocalypse Now*, 1979.

[80] Ibid.

brave enough to fight with his guts hanging out can drink from my canteen any day."[81] The absurdity of the situation is enhanced when Kilgore spotted that one member of the boat crew, who brought Willard to the Lieutenant, is a famous surfer. Consequently, he decides to clear a beach located in Charlie territory to surf there. To greet their opponent appropriately they launch a psywar operation by blasting Wagner's *Valkyrie* out of the helicopter's loudspeaker system. On arrival, the situation is not as easily manageable as Kilgore presented it and even though they were peppered by the VC he insists on surfing there. This clearly shows war fever at its best and the blunted effect the war has on the soldiers there. Underlined by Kilgore's statement "Do you smell that? … Napalm, son. Nothing else in the world smells like that. I love the smell of napalm in the morning."[82] After escaping from the preliminary stage of the apocalypse, their trip leads them to the Do Lung Bridge where a new level of anarchy is illustrated.[83] Nobody knows who is in command, the soldiers swim towards the boat hoping they can go home, and rock music sounds through the trenches. It seems as if the crew reached the precursor of the hell they still have to expect. Therefore, the movie reaches its climax when Willard and the few members left of his crew find Kurtz. They are greeted by a benighted photojournalist (Dennis Hopper), who seems to have fallen under Kurtz's spell, just like the Russian in the *Heart of Darkness*. Heads on pikes, bodies hanging from the trees, and obsequious natives introduce the audience to Kurtz's "kingdom." He himself carries an ambiguity: On the one hand he is representative for the ultimate madness produced by the war; on the other hand Kurtz is seemingly the only one who figured it all out. Just as the photojournalist states: "The man is clear in his mind,

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Röwekamp, *Antikriegsfilm*, 154.

but his soul is mad."[84] The movie ends with The Door's song "The End," just like it has started, and seeing Willard who fulfills his mission by slaughtering Kurtz with a machete, hearing the word "the horror" echoing until it fades out.

Ultimately, what message does Coppola's masterpiece convey and what position does it take? The director explains:

> The story is metaphorical: Willard's Journey up the river is also a journey into himself, and the strange and savage men he finds at the end is also an aspect of himself. Clearly, although the film is certainly 'anti-war,' its focus is not on recent politics. The intention is to make a film that is of much broader scope: and provide the audience with an exhilarated [sic!] journey into the nature of men, and his relationship to the Creation. It is the hope of the film-makers to tell his story using the unique imagery of the recent Vietnamese War; its helicopters, disposable weaponry; as well as the Rock music, the drugs and psychedelic sensibilities.[85]

Hence, Coppola answers the question and states that *Apocalypse Now* is meant to be anti-war. However, whether or not the perception of this movie points towards the same conclusion is a matter of interpretation. Furthermore, he disassociates himself from the political background of the war and, just as *The Deer Hunter,* uses Vietnam as expedient. Regardless of this usage, the question has to be raised if it is possible to produce a war movie without considering its political aspects as well.

After creating *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now,* Hollywood returns to its conservative form, by presenting the veteran in a less complex way and consequently a more simple depiction of the war. The years between the release of the movies

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[84] *Apocalypse Now*, 1979.

[85] Peter Cowie, *The Apocalypse Now Book* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 35-36.

mentioned and Stone's and Kubrick's works were traversed by films like *Rambo* (1982) and "prisoner-of-war adventure film[s]," until *Platoon* launched in 1986.[86]

The distinctiveness of *Platoon* is definitely the realistic depiction of the war, clearly a consequence of the time Stone served in the Vietnam War for the Army.[87] Right from the beginning on, the movie presents a highly critical view of the war, in contrast to the movies discussed earlier, there is no doubt that *Platoon* is an anti-war movie. The first scene is crucial for the impression prevailed throughout the whole film. The newcomers arrive in Vietnam where they are "welcomed" by tired, exhausted, and desperate soldiers who are sent home after their one year tour in Vietnam and quantities of body bags lined up. The audience follows Chris (Charlie Sheen), after he was assigned to his platoon into the Vietnamese jungle where he finds himself in his own personal hell. Not only is the constant Vietcong threat depicted, but also the dire conditions in Vietnam. There are dangerous animals, insects, mud, tropical rain and heat. On top of this, nobody in the platoon cares to integrate the newcomers, an indifference that can be fatal. Chris states: "It's scary cos nobody tells me how to do anything, cos I'm new. Nobody cares about new guys. They don't even wanna know your name. A new guy's life isn't worth as much cos he hasn't put his time in yet."[88] The movie combines many aspects of the war's reality, which are not incorporated as intensively in the two earlier movies. One would be the consumption of drugs although they are in combat situation; it seems as if the soldiers could not handle the war without them. Concerning the military structure, the criticism on the newcomer situation has already been given, however, Stone also criticizes the

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[86] Stewart O'Nan, "Second Wave of Major Films," In *The Vietnam Reader: The Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Nonfiction on the War*, ed. Stewart O'Nan (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 441.
[87] Ibid., 443.
[88] Arnold Kopelson, *Platoon*. Film. Directed by Oliver Stone. Los Angeles. Orion Pictures, 1986.

inconsistency of the chain of command. Lt. Wolfe (Mark Moses) who officially leads the platoon, which Chris is assigned to, is preempted by Sgt. Barnes (Tom Berenger) and Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe) whose orders are actually obeyed. This causes a condition which aggravates into a rivalry between these two leaders as they have different attitudes on proceeding with their mission. Especially striking about Stone's work is that the war crimes committed by Americans play a vital role in his depiction of the Vietnam War. He does not sugarcoat anything in his film but presents the madness and horror of the war like many soldiers have experienced it. Watching the village massacre scene, inevitably pictures of the My Lai Massacre cross one's mind, and they clearly show the prevalent escalation. A proliferation takes place once it doesn't matter anymore who is a Vietcong and who is a civilian, consequently violence gets out of hand when Bunny (Kevin Dillon) shouts out: "Holy Shit, you've seen that fucking head come apart? … Let's do the whole fucking village!"[89] Once again there is an uncertainty about who is in command, since the lieutenant just observes the situation but doesn't interrupt Sgt. Barnes who even threatens to kill a little girl. Stone does not strive to create a heroic protagonist, but rather describes the soldiers' attempt to survive and cope with the situation. [90] Moreover, he tries to convey a message throughout the whole movie: "In the end, good wins out over evil." Chris and his stoner buddies survive, Barnes is dead and his copycat O'Neill (John C. McGinley) remains in the jungle, leading a second platoon.[91] Chris' monologue flying out of the battle zone underlines this idea:

> I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy; we fought ourselves, and the enemy was in us. The war is over for me now, but it will always be there the rest of my days, as I'm sure Elias will be, fighting with Barnes for what Rhah called the possession of my soul. There are times I've felt

[89] *Platoon*, 1986.
[90] Auster and Leonard, *How the war was remembered*, 137.
[91] O'Nan, "Second Wave of Major Films," 447.

> like a child born of those two fathers. But be that as it may, those of us, who did make it have an obligation to build again, to teach to others what we know, and to try with what's left of our lives to find a goodness, and meaning, to this life.[92]

Oliver Stone's *Platoon* differs from *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Full Metal Jacket,* because there is no ambiguity, the good remain good and the evil remain evil. Furthermore, with Chris's last statement the director conveys his criticism of the Vietnam War. He does not consider the war pointless, but vital to America's past.[93] Stone argues that the war will always be present in American hearts and minds, particularly for the veterans. The last part directly concerns those who survived the war and, thus, urges the Vietnam War veterans to "try with what's left of [their] lives to find goodness, and meaning to this life".[94]

To complete Hollywood's depiction of the Vietnam War, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* will be analyzed. Although, it was issued just a year after Stone's *Platoon,* it imparts new aspects of the Hollywood war movie. The particularity is that in contrast to the other movies there is a bipartite structure, which shows the journey of a group who meets at basic training and reunites in Vietnam. The first section which evolves around the basic training of these young recruits critically implies the importance of the U.S. war machinery.[95] The recruits have to be assimilated to form one unit; personal peculiarities and weakness have no place in the military. They are taken out of their normal lives, receive new names, and have to

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[92] *Platoon*, 1986.
[93] Röwekamp, *Antikriegsfilm*, 173.
[94] *Platoon*, 1986.
[95] Michael Klein, "Historical Memory, Film, and the Vietnam Era," In *From Hanoi to Hollywood. The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. by Linda Dittmar and Michaud Gene (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 29.

comply with the drill instructor Gunnery Sergeant Hartman's (R. Lee Ermy) measures. Consequently, everyone who protrudes, such as Private Leonard 'Gomer Pyle' Lawrence (Vincent D'Onforio), has to be homogenized to fit the community. Private J.T. 'Joker' Davis (Matthew Modine) is instructed to help Pyle to do better in his training, but even Joker cannot accept that he is constantly getting the group in trouble. Therefore, the other privates exact their revenge on Pyle with a blanket party.[96] However, through the constant animosity by the other privates and the drill sergeant he seems to be slipping, a process culminating in his suicide and the murder of the drill instructor the night he found out he successfully finished basic training. In the second section of the movie, the concept of the perfect American soldier generated by the unsympathetic drill sergeant is dismantled starting with a drastic change of setting, when we see Joker who's working as a combat correspondent for the *Stars and Stripes* magazine in Saigon.[97] Hence, Kubrick does not only offer his impression of the Vietnam War, but also his opinion on the media coverage of this conflict. For instance the meeting of the *Stars and Stripes* correspondents comprises many different aspects. When Joker points out that there might happen something during the Tet ceasefire, which clearly hints at the failure of American intelligence service to predict the Tet Offensive. Furthermore, Kubrick addresses censorship and terminology by integrating a directive which states that "search and destroy" should now be replaced with "sweep and clear" to make it more catchy.[98] Moreover, Joker's last story was not fascinating enough and he is told to rewrite

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[96] Especially in the military a community punishment where the victim is fixed to his bed and the other members of the group hit him with flails made out of, e.g. soap bar in a towel.

[97] Klein, "Historical Memory, Film, and the Vietnam Era," 29.

[98] Stanley Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket*. Film. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Burbank: Warner Bros., 1987.

it: "Winning of hearts and minds. … That's why God passed the law of probability. Rewrite it with a happy ending, say, one kill. A sapper or an officer … Grunts[99] like reading about dead officers." On Joker's question why not a general Lt. Lockhart (John Terry) responds he gets the following response: "You'd like your guys to read the paper and feel bad? In case you didn't know, this is not a popular war. Our job is to report the news that the 'why-are-we-here' civilian newsman ignore." Kubrick's attitude towards both the military and civilian media coverage is obvious and once more enhanced by the label of the banner on the wall of the newsroom: "First to go, last to know – we will defend to death our right to be misinformed".[100] In the following, Jokers prediction of the Tet Offensive proves to be true, therefore, he is sent to report from a military point of view, to reverse the public opinion on the Vietcong's attack. On his arrival, the audience observes the effect of the offensive, mass graves, an enormous body count, and plenty of reporters and photographers on-site. Joker is sent to Phu Bai, where he retrieves his comrade 'Cowboy,' Sgt. Robert Evans (Arliss Howard) from basic training. Having portrayed the war from a distance, by following Joker's journey, the audience now is confronted with the sad and shocking reality of war.

Once again, the media criticism becomes apparent when Cowboy introduces Joker to his squad: "This is my bro, Joker, from the island. They're from *Stars and Stripes*. You'll be famous," topped with one of the soldiers posing for a picture next to a dead Vietnamese.[101] Pursuing this image TV interviews are held, in order for the soldiers to present their opinion on the war and the need of the American intervention. The soldiers are treated like TV stars and the fact that one member of their squad just died

[99] Coll. for infantry.
[100] *Full Metal Jacket*, 1987.
[101] Ibid.

seems to be irrelevant. As the group moves on through Hué, they have to suffer from many casualties as they are attacked by a sniper. As the Lusthog squad also loses Cowboy, they start a counter attack to terminate their enemy, who turns out to be a little girl. While the rest of the squad hesitates on how to proceed, Joker decides to end her suffering. The film ends with the troop heading out on patrol, while singing the Mickey Mouse theme, and Joker's voice over stating: "I am so happy that I am alive … in one piece, and short. I'm in a world of shit, yes. But I am alive. And I am not afraid."[102]

Full Metal Jacket conveys a criticism on the war, the military, and the media coverage of the Vietnam War. Just like *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now,* it plays with a constant ambiguity, which is embodied by Joker, the war correspondent who wears a piece sign on his uniform and has "born to kill" written on his helmet. Moreover, "[w]here Platoon affirms the old romantic idea of war as a crucible that builds men, Kubrick seems to be saying – through Pyle and then Joker and the men of the Lusthog squad – that Vietnam, or simply the war, takes these boys not from innocence to experience but to numbness or madness."[103] Furthermore, there is to mention that since *Full Metal Jacket* was released 12 years after the war has ended, one would expect an incorporation of the antiwar movement, which is neglected in this movie, plainly through its absence.[104]

The Vietnam War movie, no matter in which facet it appears, fulfills an important function for the American society. It was both a way of historical revision and a way to close with the past. Consequently, by using film as a medium a definatory power is retrieved over a war, which

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[102] Ibid.
[103] O'Nan, "Second Wave of Major Films," 453.
[104] Klein, "Historical Memory, Film, and the Vietnam Era," 34.

could not be won and was lost after all.[105] The four movies presented seemingly differ from this impression, since they involve several themes close to reality. Those movies are intended to play with exaggeration, overstatement and ambiguity, to address their criticism and to leave room for interpretation and discussion.

Conclusion

Resuming, what is the role of the media in the Vietnam War? Clearly, the opinions on this question are diverted, however, the overall consensus comprises that, although the media had an influence on the public opinion of the Americans and the people worldwide, it cannot be blamed for ending the Vietnam War. The surrender of the Americans in Vietnam was affected by many factors on top of the media coverage, such as the lack of knowledge of the Vietcong's guerilla techniques, the landscape, and the culture.

Furthermore, the North Vietnamese did not win the war being superior fighters, but being more motivated. The Vietnam War was a prime example that one must be convinced of the cause – it must be worth fighting for. This motivation and thereby the public support of the involvement in Vietnam could not be upheld after events, such as the Tet Offensive or the massacre of My Lai. It is needless to say that after all through the media coverage, and the new medium TV, these pictures found their way into the living rooms worldwide. However, even the TV coverage mostly remained too mellow to achieve a drastic change of opinion. In addition to that, the broadcasted reports initially distorted the image of the war, by presenting only little combat actions and by depicting the American GIs rather as Hollywood actors than soldier. The perception of the war through the TV reports, in fact covered the interests of the politicians to portray the war in a cautious manner.[106]

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[105] Paul, "Die aufscheinende Apokalypse des Krieges in Vietnam," 100.
[106] Beham, *Kriegstrommeln*, 86-89.

Nevertheless, the role of the media is both exceptional and unique as depicted by Jacqueline Phinney, who states that "[t]he Vietnam War was a turning point in the management of war reports" and that "media has the power to move people."[107] It appears that at the end of the Vietnam War a scapegoat had to be found to explain and justify the defeat the U.S. suffered from, as it is the first war in American history that was lost live on TV. "Whether thought of as savior or villain, the press has enjoyed a virtually unanimous reputation as a powerful actor whose adversarial relationship to the United States government and military played a large part in ending American involvement in the war."[108]

Looking at the way the movies that were scrutinized depicted the Vietnam War, a similar picture is painted. The perception of the conflict in Indochina in the movies is equally diverse than on the role of the media during the Vietnam War. However, it was generally agreed that the conflict exceeded most previous wars in the cruelty, the futility, and the amount of casualties. Although, every movie depicts the horror of Vietnam differently, their overall objective seems to be to come to terms with the loss of the Vietnam War and to erode the blemish it left in its wake.

Finally, the saying that "there was more of it in Vietnam" proved to be true and led to a new assessment on the handling of the war reporting in the future. Consequently, the new mantra of the American information and foreign policy emerged to be: "No more Vietnams,"[109] to prevent a repetition of America's nightmare.

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[107] Phinney, "And that's the way it is: The media's role in ending the Vietnam War," 2.
[108] Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, 216.
[109] Title of Nixon's analysis of the Vietnam War.

4.
Transference of Trauma in Body Genres: Wronged Women and Damaged Childhoods in *Ringu* (1998) and *Audition* (1999)

Eunah LEE

Despite its history of upheaval and reformation Japan has created and abides by a national myth that posits an essential continuity between its modern national development and its pre-modern era. According to Marilyn Ivy in *Discourses of the Vanishing*, Japan's claiming its coevalness, that is to say, "the coincident modernity" corresponding to that of Euro-American nations, [1] has nevertheless created a collective national anxiety and trauma. Since first opening itself up to the imperial West in the Meiji era, Japan has made persistent efforts to form itself as a modern nation-state commensurate with Western powers, which accompanied social and cultural turbulence such as imperial expansion, totalitarianism, violent global wars, military defeat in World War II, and the U.S. Occupation. Fran Lloyd points out that Japan's expansion—invading and colonizing other Asian nations—resulted from an adaptation of Western modernity. [2] As the West had constructed itself as the dominant world power in the nineteenth century, Japan attempted to have "a Japan-dominated international order in East Asia" as a replacement for Western power over Asia.[3] By attacking Pearl Harbor in 1941 and thus acting as an aggressor on American soil, Japan caused the U.S. to join the War, initially in the Pacific theater

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[1] Marilyn Ivy, "National-Cultural Phantasms and Modernity's Losses" in *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 8.

[2] Fran Lloyd, "Introduction: Critical Reflections" in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2002), 13.

[3] Elise K. Tipton. "Contesting the Modern in the 1930s" in *Modern Japan: A Social and Political History* (London: Routledge, 2008), 130.

only but eventually in Europe as well. The mobilization of U.S. forces ultimately led to the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that resulted in Japan's surrender and occupation by American forces.[4]

Post-war Japan's rapid growth is often called an "economic miracle"; the nation achieved astonishing changes in the course of transforming itself "from the ashes of defeat" into "an economic power second only to the United States."[5] The ways in which such miraculous achievements were possible, Tipton asserts, is due to the unique Japanese combination of continuing to value its traditionally hierarchical social structure and communal sense of loyalty while also privileging the modern ideologies of enlightenment and progress. The dual emphasis on the pre-modern ideology of Confucianism, which values "hard work, frugality, loyalty and learning,"[6] and on the aforementioned modern ideologies, which promote fast economic development, enabled the fostering of productive and "cooperative relations between labor and management" as well as "the commitment of workers to their companies" that enhanced productivity.[7]

David R. Leheny suggests, quoting William W. Kelly and Merry I. White, that Japan is a "family nation" that has "an idealized relationship between a benevolent and competent state, enterprising and seemingly infallible Japanese firms, and an ethnically homogenous nation structured around

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[4] William W. Kelly and Merry I. White, "Students, Slackers, Singles, Seniors, and Strangers: Transforming a Family-Nation," in *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism,* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006) quoted in Lloyd, *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, 13.

[5] Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 187.

[6] In *Modern Japan* (2008), Tipton notes that although Japanese citizens have been skeptical since the early seventies about the sacrifices they have made for the nation's rapid growth, the secure employment conditions and material abundance characterizing the lives of salary men in big enterprises, and their families, by extension, may have silenced the doubts of such individuals (214).

[7] Ibid., 204

traditional nuclear families."[8] Nuclear families, in Japanese society, have functioned within a social structure that is constructed to maximize the efficiency of the labor force, which has resulted in the repression of women.[9] The idealized family is required to uphold a clear distinction between the roles of husband and wife, who sacrifice themselves for each other, their family, "the greater good" of society, and the nation.[10] In this structure, Japanese society has emphasized the role of mothers in cultivating and educating their children to be modern citizens.[11] Thus, it is the sacrifices of women that was inevitable for Japan's rapid growth in finance, as well as its industrial and technological advancement that again brought back material abundance to family members, and, in turn, reaffirmed the validity of the national image as a homogeneous middle-class nation with hegemonic ideologies.[12]

The Japanese economic bubble in the 1980s, characterized by a rapid increase in the price of stocks and real

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[8] David R. Leheny, "A 'Vague Anxiety' in 1990s Japan," in *Think Global, Fear Local:*
Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 28.

[9] Ichiyo Muto, "The Birth of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s," In *The*
Other Japan: Conflict, Compromise, and Resistance Since 1945, ed. Joe Moore (Armonk, NY: East Gate Books, 1997), 154.

[10] Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 214.

[11] In the Meiji period, according to Marilyn Ivy (1995), the establishment of modern nation-building occurred alongside the restoration of the emperor as well as the building of a modern citizenry that was educated, conscripted, and disciplined into becoming imperial subjects. The scheme of building educated and disciplined modern subjects, which resulted from the ideologies of modernity—a developmental sense of time, notions of change, development, and civility—has a parallel with the development and conceptualization of modern notions of the child and childhood (6).

[12] Susan Napier, "Woman Lost: the Dead, Damaged, or Absent Female in Postwar
Fantasy," in *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 56.

estate, burst in the early 1990s. As a result, the number of bankruptcies increased greatly, and banks were forced to deal with massive non-performing loans. In addition, many alarming socio-economic and technological crises during the time added more reason to doubt modern national ideologies regarding the continuation of national development. Two of the critical social issues that accompanied the recession in Japan during the nineties were the increasing rate of juvenile crime and "the sexual precociousness of girls and young women."[13] A significant number of girls and young women were involved in "compensated dating,"[14] which came to epitomize, and was tied to, the large scale of social anxiety. The aforementioned events, along with the collapse of the stock market and banking system, were "attended by growing evidence of distrust in large institutions,"[15] and this led to the creation of a prevalent sense of crisis in Japanese society. The long economic recession that started in the early nineties compelled many observers to recognize the possible failure and ruptures in both the modern ideologies of development and progress, and the predominant image of Japan as a primarily middle-class nation with homogeneous and harmonious familial relations at various social levels.[16]

In this paper, I will delineate the ways in which the trauma of modern nation-building in Japan, which has been repressed under Japan's official narrative of linear progress, is revealed through an aesthetics of rupture—in terms of narrative and visuality—in J-horror and extreme films. Analyzing Nakata Hideo's *Ringu* (1998) and Miike Takashi's *Audition* (1999) as representative examples, I will elucidate how the dysfunctional nuclear families and single female

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[13] Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local*, 29.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Akiko Hashimoto and John W. Traphagan, "Changing Japanese Families,"
in *Imagined Families, Lived Families: Culture and Kinship in Contemporary Japan* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 9.

characters, their realities shaped by the social conditions of the nineties, are shown as transposed repetitions of those who were marginalized in the past for the sake of Japan's rapidly achieved capitalist and technological modernity and supremacy in the global arena.[17] Cathy Caruth points out that particular stories of trauma are "[narratives] of a belated experience, far from telling of [escapes] from reality—rather [attesting to their] endless impact on a life."[18] Trauma is generated in the catastrophic events that leave wounds in the mind that will not be healed, but repeatedly come back to the survivor. The nature of trauma can neither be known nor be explicable in language, and thus trauma returns "to haunt the survivor later on."[19] According to Caruth, a story of trauma is structured "not simply [to] represent the violence of a collision but [it] also conveys the impact of its incomprehensibility."[20]

In horror and extreme films from Japan, violence is reenacted for unknown reasons in the present, obliquely taking into account tragic and traumatic past events of the marginalized and oppressed with linguistically inexpressible traumatic moments often inserted as fragmented and disturbing scenes. For example, in *Ringu*, the shocking face of a female ghost is revealed in a disturbing moment where Reiko, the protagonist, finds the rotten body of Sadako in a well. From the muddy water in the well, a hand comes out and

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[17] A prevalent element of the J-horror and extreme films of the late 1990s and 2000s is the dysfunctional nuclear family, including the depiction of the anxiety and stress of single women and mothers regarding childbearing. In *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* (2005), Jay McRoy argues the meaning of dysfunctional nuclear family units, constituted of a single mother and child, as shown in Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) and *Dark Water* (2002), and Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002), in relation to contemporary Japanese culture and its traumatic experience of modernization.

[18] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2010), 7.

[19] Ibid., 4.

[20] Ibid., 7.

grabs Reiko's arm, as the head hidden behind a tangle of long black hair emerges. Eerie and unrecognizable moaning and rumbling sounds enhance the scene's sense of unease as Reiko unveils the face from behind the hair, which falls out as soon as it is touched. In *Audition*, Asami, who looks to all outward appearances like a submissive Asian woman with her slender figure, long, straight hair, and a black apron over a white fleet skirt and top—although her black gloves may hint at something slightly less innocent—tortures a middle-aged man by poking numerous needles into his stomach and eyes, and then slices off one of his feet with a razor wire. Paralyzed, all her victim can do is groan. These films feature shocking horror, and intensely visualized depictions of pain, which are the hallmarks of what has come to be recognized as J-horror or extreme cinema.

When global audiences encounter characters' psychological shocks and physical pain through the dramatized visualizations and plots of these films, they often respond bodily through their own skin by imagining and empathizing with characters. From feminist film theories to cultural studies, discourses on the spectatorship of body genres, a term referring to genres of horror, melodrama, and pornography that create bodily reactions from spectators, have focused on their subversive characteristics, as films belonging to a genre that challenges the binary distinction between object and subject, and high and low art. Linda Williams notes that body genre films have been regarded as a degraded cultural form, as it "[privileges] sensation" and "directly [addresses] the spectator's body" (5).[21] "Viewers feel too directly, too viscerally, manipulated by text," she asserts, and this causes "the lack of aesthetic distance, a sense of overinvolvement in sensation and emotion."[22] Steven Shaviro theorizes the ways in which "an excessive capacity" through

[21] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4: (1991): 5.
[22] Ibid.

cinematic images affects the body of spectators "unwarrantedly." [23] He argues that spectators respond "viscerally to visual forms, before having the leisure to read or interpret them as symbols". [24] Furthermore, Patricia MacCormack argues that the spectatorship of minoritarians—referring to women, racial others, and perverts—is created through cinemasochism, or the spectator's "submission to the image beyond comprehension."[25] This submission leads to a "loss of the self that involves an encounter of the infinite outside within the self" of spectators.[26]

J-horror and extreme cinemas from Japan contain numerous narrative gaps, with no reasonable explanation provided for why certain horrifying images appear or how such gruesome events in the past are related to the characters living in the filmic present. In such narrative structures, the filmic horror is created through a psychological shock that is generated by abrupt insertions into the films' narratives of graphic images of unrecognizable, dismembered, or distorted bodies or faces, or of sequences of extremely violent past events. Within this structure, untold and unhealed wounds return as an additional source of trauma, forcing audience members to witness traumatic events of the past as well as absorb the shock of violence and feel the sensation of pain in the present. Along this line of discourses about the bodily effects and meanings generated through cinematic visuality, this paper reveals, through analysis of *Ringu*, the ways in which inexplicable past traumas are visualized or materialized and then affect diegetic spectators (characters) in the film, whose fear and shock in turn are delivered to extradiegetic spectators (global audiences of *Ringu*) through terrifying images of the characters' horrified faces. In addition, *Ringu* presents

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[23] Steven Shaviro, "Film Theory and Visual Fascination," in *Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 30.
[24] Ibid., 39.
[25] Patricia MacCormack, "Cinemasochism," in *Cinesexuality* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 41.
[26] Ibid., 42.

characters who can sense and recognize traumatic incidents by touching people or things, and those traumatic incidents in the film are visualized in the form of flashback scenes. The film visualizes the ways in which the sense of touch evokes past memories of trauma that are repressed in the official history and ideologies as well as being inexplicable in language. Laura Marks, in her analysis of films by diasporic or ethnic directors in the West, advances the notion that certain visual impacts create bodily responses called tactile visuality, or a "new image from the memory of the sense of touch."[27] She suggests that haptic visuality leads spectators to embody or sense, even if they are unable to understand, the traumatic cultural memories of others who are undergoing "the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge."[28]

By focusing on disjunctive editing (flashback) scenes in *Audition*, this paper additionally discloses the ways in which the shock of traumatic incidents is visualized through cinematic effects. In terms of visual art forms that are associated with traumatic events or memories in the past and that recreate shocking sensations, Jill Bennett suggests that the past experience of trauma—which cannot be explained in the order of language—is revived as art that conveys the shock of trauma (the flashback that one involuntarily revisits) to spectators such that the past experience becomes "an experience of the present, an encounter with an 'outside'"[29] Art forms that create a different language of "affect" can transmit shock to spectators by its visuality.[30] The pain of trauma is not registered in the process of memorizing daily experience, "common memory," but it is inscribed in the

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[27] Laura U. Marks, *The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses* (Durham: Duke University Press:2000), xi.
[28] Ibid.,1.
[29] Jill Bennett, "On the Subject of Trauma," in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and*
Contemporary Art (Stanford: Stanford U Press, 2005), 11.
[30] Ibid., 26.

body through the skin, or "the sense memory."[31] The visually striking scenes and disjunctive narratives in these films function as aesthetic tools for spectators to re-experience the traumatic shock of characters victimized by the patriarchal capitalist modern nation-building process of Japan. Along with delineating the traumatic modernization history of Japan, analysis of these two films—*Ringu* and *Audition*—will articulate the ways in which the collective memories of past trauma are interwoven with the altered socio-economic conditions of Japanese society in the 1990s.

Nakata Hideo's *Ringu* presents the collective memories of past trauma in the stories of women and children who were victimized within the patriarchal and nationalist ideologies. In the film, a female ghost who was murdered as a child by her father in the 1950s, during Japan's post-war modernization process,[32] returns via modern technological devices such as a videotape, televisions and telephones. The fear and horror experienced by the murdered child before her death in the 1950s return as unrecognized horror in the late 1990s, when the nation suffered during its economic recession from a loss of hope for the idealized nuclear family. Her curse, embedded in a video, is brought to bear on late-twentieth-century Tokyoites who happen to watch the video—its viewers die on the seventh day after watching the video—in the narrative present. In the expectation of finding out what caused the death of previous spectators of the video, the main characters of the film (and extradiegetic spectators as well) finish watching the video by choice. The video, however, refuses to

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[31] Ibid., 31-32.

[32] My analysis of trauma narratives in this paper are based on Jacque Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis for trauma, the encounter of the Real. Lacan, in "Tuche and Automation" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1988), suggests that the Real is the unspeakable, inexpressible, ineffable, unrepresentable truth, an undifferentiated space outside language that exists outside the Symbolic order. Lacan writes, "The real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of trauma" (55).

reveal the cause of the viewers' deaths. Although hinting that "something horrible happened," the video insists through its successive presentation of cryptic scenes that it cannot be explained verbally or logically. Desperately looking for ways to resolve the curse, the main characters delve into the contextual and historical meanings of each scene of the video in the hope of tracing the curse back to its origin. Following the main characters' investigation in the film, the audience members of *Ringu* turn into witnesses of a hidden truth from the past. The cursed video in the film, and the film *Ringu* itself, are media for diegetic as well as extra-diegetic audiences to experience the unrepresentable trauma.

Eric White argues that the narrative of *Ringu* does not reiterate the traditional motifs of the return of the repressed, in which "the vengeful ghost losing its eternal rest" comes back and haunts the living, while its grudge is resolved by being "exorcized by means of a therapeutic catharsis." [33] Instead White hypothesizes that the endless transmission of the curse through the videotape and other technological devices highlights the fear and anxiety caused by the "simulacral proliferation of information in media-saturated culture."[34] He also asserts that the hidden faces of ghosts and the blurred images of the killed people's faces in photographs represent "the intrusion of 'posthuman' otherness," which means the imposition of "a new cultural logic of the simulacrum" onto "contemporary cultural life." [35] White suggests reading the narrative of *Ringu* as a postmodern text, that is to say, not as another uncanny horror story following the formula of "the return of the repressed," but as a narrative of the symptoms of postmodern and post-industrialized society. I claim, however, that the urban fear from which the films were born, and which the films in turn convey to

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[33] Eric White, "Case Study: Nakata Hideo's *Ringu* and *Ringu* 2," in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. Jay McRoy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U Press, 2005), 40.
[34] Ibid., 41.
[35] Ibid.

audiences, is not only the social anxiety caused in the nineties by recession. The films underscore the trauma of citizens who perceive the rupture in modern nation-building, on which the aforementioned social anxiety might shed light. I propose that the deviation in *Ringu*'s narrative arc from conventional horror films—the repressed returning without cathartic exorcism, only expanding the grudge through technology—is a post-traumatic text that reveals the traumatic past in Japan's modern nation-building project.

This anxiety about encountering the rupture is initially presented in *Ringu* in terms of exposing and relating the cursed video to the lives of teenagers on the loose in the nineties. The first victim in *Ringu* is a teenage girl named Tomoko (Takeuchi Yuko) who watched the video when she spent a night with her boyfriend and other friends on the Izu peninsula. In Tomoko's room, two teenage girls—Tomoko and Masami (Sato Hitomi)—are talking about Tomoko's secret: whether or not Tomoko has a sexual relationship with her boyfriend. This topic is overlapped with Masami's topic, which revolves around a rumor about the cursed video. At a certain point, Tomoko's parents call to inform the girls that they will be returning late. Tomoko and Masami respond with relief to the news, and they decide to celebrate their night of freedom. Tomoko, however, encounters the horror embedded in the video and dies of shock. Her shocking death scene then segues into a scene in which a camera screen records an interview of a teenage girl regarding the rumor of the cursed video. The main character Reiko (Matsushima Nanako) interviews several girls and learns from one of the interviewees that two high school students who watched the video were found dead in their parked car. Later, watching the news, Reiko finds out that these teenagers were mysteriously killed in a parked and locked car while engaged in sexual activity. These libertine teenagers' deaths draw Reiko's attention to the investigation of the cursed video, with the result that the circulation of the cursed video expands from the teenagers to Reiko's family. The fear of perceiving this

rupture stems from the phenomenon of middle-class teenage girls in the nineties who lived in comfortably well-off residential neighborhoods but overstepped the expected roles of girls that undergird the ideologies of the harmonious nuclear family.

Ringu depicts trauma that has lost a chance to be properly recognized, but having been buried, comes back in the form of a revenging ghost whose life is linked with that of a divorced woman who is a single mother. The link between two dysfunctional families—Shizuko's in the 1950s and Reiko's in the 1990s—represents the anxiety of post-industrial Japan with respect to its national ideologies about nuclear families and the role of mothers. During the recession in the 1990s, married women whose husbands might be laid off returned to the workforce in order to maintain the lifestyle to which their families were accustomed, as well as to support educational expenses for their children, although most of these women could only acquire part-time jobs. Despite their changed social conditions, these women were still responsible for housework and even wanted to prove that their working outside the home did not cause any inconvenience for their family members.[36] As a symptom of this altered cultural and economic state of Japanese society, the horror and extreme films released in the late 1990s present social anxiety caused by the loss of the idealized nuclear family and the undermining of the hegemonic view of women's expected role as dedicated mothers and auxiliary workers.

In *Ringu*, the main character Reiko is a busy career woman and a single mother with a seven-year-old son, Yoichi (Otaka Rikiya). From the first scene in which Yoichi appears, to the end of the film, Reiko is presented as a hard-working single mother who does not spend enough time with her son, and is therefore anxious for, and apologetic toward, him. Although Reiko and Yoichi are seen to be a close and loving mother and son, the film depicts tension between the

[36] Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 226.

demands placed on Reiko as a reporter and as a mother; throughout the film, Reiko repeatedly apologizes to Yoichi about getting home late from work and being unable to spend time with him. In the first scene in which Reiko and Yoichi are shown together, Reiko is late from work. She apologizes to her son, as they are scheduled to attend a pre-funeral ceremony at Tomoko's house (Tomoko is Reiko's niece and Yoichi's cousin). Yoichi clearly is used to such situations, and has not only changed into suitable clothes but even prepared Reiko's as well. Most of the time during the film, Reiko is away from Yoichi pursuing her investigation, and she frequently calls her son to tell him she is sorry for that. One night she stays with him, only to leave him at his grandfather's house so that she can travel the next day to further her investigation. That very night, however, Yoichi leaves his bed and watches the cursed tape while Reiko is asleep in the next room. After Reiko's realization that the only way to save her son is to have another person watch the video, she chooses to transmit the curse by showing it to her own father, even knowing it will cause his death. The film thus depicts the guilt of a single mother, who feels she is failing her son by being unable to provide him with a functioning nuclear family in which she provides a constant and nurturing presence. At the same time, it reveals how her guilt motivates her to transmit fear, in the form of the cursed video, to others.

The anxiety of characters who are situated in, and deal with, dysfunctional family issues in the narrative present of these film is interwoven with the mystery of a revengeful ghost whose origin can be traced back to the 1950s. Reiko's ex-husband Ryuji (Sanada Hiroyuki) is a professor with psychic powers but also an irresponsible father who is completely absent from his son's life (not even recognizing him when he passes Yoichi in the street). Despite his apathy as a father, Ryuji ends up helping Reiko investigate the curse. The divorced couple's investigation uncovers the buried story of a child who encountered a tragic death in the process of Japan's modernization. The curse of the video turns out to be

rooted in the murder of a young girl named Sadako, in the fifties, who is assumed to be the illegitimate child of an affair between Yamamura Shizuko and Dr. Ikuma Heihachiro. Shizuko was known for her psychic powers, while Dr. Ikuma was a famous professor of modern psychology who was convinced of Shizuko's psychic powers and attempted to demonstrate them in public. Following the failed demonstration, Shizuko committed suicide and Dr. Ikuma had to resign from his job. Ultimately, he throws his daughter Sadako down a well, and it is she who returns to the narrative present as a ghost. The illegitimate union of psychic Shizuko and Dr. Ikuma is echoed in Reiko and Ryuji's relationship; in the past the psychic was a woman (Shizuko), whereas now it is the husband (Ryuji) who has psychic powers. In a sense, the two couples are similarly marginal—one couple is having a secret affair and produces a child who cannot be acknowledged, while the other couple had a state-sanctioned relationship but broke it off after producing a publicly acknowledged child. The present couple's such characteristics seem diverted from the earlier couple's, taking a modernized and legalized form, but Reiko and Ryuji unwittingly spread the curse to their child rather than end it; Sadako's curse survives through being watched by Yoichi. This once-dysfunctional but reunited family—Reiko, Ryuji, and Yoichi—repeats mistakes similar to those from the past, and, by becoming mediums of the curse, reproduce tragedies in the present.

The combination of the pre-modern element and western modernity is, in *Ringu,* repeated through particular features of the characters, while the residue of trauma from the union of the pre-modern and the modern results in the unstoppable curse spreading. The aforementioned events of Sadako and Dr. Ikuma are set in 1950s Japan—especially, the post-war era when Japan struggled to reestablish itself as a modern nation after having undergone the traumas of war, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and several years of American occupation. In the nation's attempt to recover from trauma and redeem itself in the eyes of the

Allied powers by employing capitalist ideologies and technology from the West, there was a belief that Japan must remove pre-modern elements that still resided in its culture in the fifties.[37] Midori Matsui contends that Japan's acceptance and domestication of modern Western ideas and culture represented an "incomplete digestion," as Japan preserved its hierarchical pre-modern system in the fields of politics, economics, and education.[38]

In the film, the symptoms of that repression are shown as the story of a returned Sadako. Shizuko's psychic powers, which may symbolize the pre-modern elements, is denied and repressed by the modern western ideologies of mainstream society in post-war Japan. A western-educated psychologist, Dr. Ikuma attempts, through the public demonstration of Shizuko's psychic powers, to integrate pre-modern elements into the modernization process. But the only results are the tragic deaths of Shizuko and himself, as well as the trauma or grudge produced by their illegitimate union—Sadako. The symbolically loaded story of Sadako portrays that which has been repressed returning as a hybrid being of spirituality and technology that has taken form as an "incomplete digestion" of modernity; Sadako's psychic power allows her to have control over, and empower itself through, atomization, that is to say, telephone wires and television sets. She inherited her mother's psychic powers but they seem to be supplemented by her father's rationality and scientific capability. However powerful she may have been, Sadako was

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[37] Japan's development as a late-modernizing nation-state is paralleled with its becoming a "colonialist, imperialist, and (some would say) fascist-Japan" that was able to challenge the dominant Western nations during World War II. In such efforts to emulate the West and/or become the West, Japan has been self-fashioning its being coeval or possessing an identical modernity with Western nations, a state that negates its forceful and intrusive encounter with Western modernity but emphasizes the continuity of Japan's progressive history (Ivy 1995, 6).

[38] . Midori Matsui, "The Place of Marginal Positionality: Legacies of Japanese Anti-Modernity," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art,* ed. Lloyd Fran (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 142.

thrown into a well by her father, remaining there until her grudge had deepened to the point that her tragic story, untold and unmourned, has become the source of yet another trauma. In *Ringu*, then, anxiety about failing the modern ideologies of continuity and linear progress as well as a harmonious society built upon the nuclear family is shown to be a path for the repressed past to affect the narrative present.

As if the ghost of Sadako from the past has emerged from the television screen via the video, the film *Ringu*, itself, rematerializes the past in a visual form via the touch of characters, which represents a spiritual/traditional way of assessing the horror. When Ryuji touches material that is related to the grudge of Sadako, he can see the past. The traumatic past event is reestablished via contact from the present. When traumatic events or memories are visualized as images, the shock turns not into representation but a bodily process, a process, according to Bennett, that is "experienced not as a remembering of the past but as a continuous negotiation of a present with indeterminable links to the past."[39] Ryuji's psychic power enables him to see past events, and the film *Ringu* allows the extradiegetic audience members, in turn, to become witness to traumatic events in the diegetic past. The scenes uncover details of the untold past, such as the public demonstration held to display Shizuko's psychic power, in which she is accused of fraudulence, and her daughter Sadako's killing of a reporter who accused her mother of faking her psychic powers. Another scene in the final part of the film visualizes Dr. Ikuma's killing of Sadako by throwing her into a well. In such scenes, these untold histories are conveyed through Ryuji's hallucinations, but they are also presented in black-and-white scenes resembling historical documentary footage, as if they are records of truth (Fig. 1). Ryuji's hallucinations are being materialized in the visual form of documentary footage, as if Sadako's ghost has

[39] Bennet, *Empathic Vision*, 38.

Fig.1. Still from *Ringu*

from an image on the television screen into a material being. The repressed memory that official history refuses to contain is preserved as sense memory, and it can only be revealed by someone who truly wants to learn the truth. The characters' touching of items related to a past memory allows the characters as well as the extradiegetic spectators of *Ringu* to recognize the other's trauma. The boundaries between images and materiality, imagination and reality, and spirituality and technology are thus blurred in the film's narrative. Through the ruptures of the temporally complex alternation of the narrative present and past, and from the aforementioned blurred dualities, the untold history of the past crawls out and demands the attention of the living in the contemporary world.

Director Nakata uses the film itself, and the cursed video within the film, to convey the shock of trauma from the past to the present by visualizing the face of fear and terror. Although the horror—the ghost from the video—does not show its face to the extradiagetic spectators until the end, the reactions of characters within the diegesis suggest that the *diegetic* spectators see the ghost, which returns to the narrative present via television screens. That horror kills the diegetic spectators of the video in the film, and in turn, shocks the

extradiegetic spectators, the audience members of *Ringu,* by showing the horrified look of the diegetic spectators. Tomoko is on the first floor by herself, her friend Masami having left briefly, when a television comes on of its own accord. Tomoko turns the television off and walks away, but feeling something she turns back. Apparently she sees something extremely horrifying, but the camera only shows a close-up of Tomoko's shocked face (Fig. 2), which stays static a few seconds and then changes into an overexposed negative of the scene in black-and-white (Fig. 3), intensifying the shock on her face.

Figs. 2 and 3. Stills from *Ringu*

With respect to the act of seeing others experience sensational pain, Bennett writes that "seeing sensation for an audience surely entails feeling or, at the very least, experiencing a tension between an affective encounter with a real body in pain and an encounter with the body as image or ground of

representation."[40] In *Ringu*, the horror is imitated by the characters' faces in the film, and the horror is revealed through the sensational pain inscribed in their faces. Seeing the expressions of inexplicable shock and fear, which are not "the graphic spectacle of the violence" but "the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence," leads audience members to make contact with the truth, the pain of the traumatized.[41] At the end of the film, it is finally revealed that the distorted face of the female ghost Sadako, full of pain and anger, is the horror. When Sadako, hiding her face behind her long dark hair, comes out of the screen and reveals her facial expression of utter shock and fear (Fig. 4), characters watching her face within the film themselves end up dying of fear and shock (Fig 5).

Figs. 4. and 5. Stills from *Ringu*

[40] Ibid., 38.
[41] Ibid., 39.

The trauma that Sadako experiences is conveyed to extradiagetic audiences' bodies by "the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence." Within the narratives of the horror and fear experienced by a young girl in the past, the distorted faces of the ghost and the spectators in the film are shocking and terrifying, and the concept that a monstrous ghost might emerge from a daily object—a television—may well intensify the horror of extradiegetic spectators who watch the screen playing *Ringu* in the extradiagetic present.

The traditional motif of the wronged woman who comes back as a ghost is transformed, in Miike's *Audition*, into a dramatically distorted "modern day heroine." The catch phrase, "modern day heroine," is used within the film to advertise a (sham) audition whose ostensible purpose is to cast a main actress for a movie, when in actuality the audition is being held for Aoyama to find his "ideal" woman so he can court her to be his future wife. *Audition* starts with a scene in which Aoyama Ryoko (Matsuda Miyuki) passes away in a hospital room while her husband Aoyama Shigeharu (Ishibashi Ryo) watches.[42] Their young son Shigehiko (Sawaki Tetsu) arrives carrying an art project from school for his mother and witnesses her death, broken-hearted. The film, starting from the end of a harmonious nuclear family, moves forward seven years after the mother's death. It is during Japan's recession, and Aoyama has decided to look for a new wife. Through the sham audition, Aoyama meets attractive 26-year-old Yamazaki Asami (Shiina Eihi) and later has a sexual relationship with her. Asami, while seeming to satisfy all of Aoyama's expectations for his ideal wife, is revealed over the course of the film to be a monstrous murderer, abuser, and revenger motivated by traumatic childhood memories from being raised in a horrifyingly dysfunctional family. *Audition* presents the repressed anger of the marginalized female who returns as a monstrous modern-day heroine who tortures,

[42] An adaptation of Murakami Ryu's novel of the same title.

dismembers, and abuses men's bodies using physiological knowledge and tools.

Stephen Hantke reads this film in the context of a web of feminist discourses—that is to say, he uncovers the meanings of the female character's revenge, both in the socio-political context of patriarchal Japanese society and in reference to the film's allusions to previous Japanese films in which female characters are depicted as sexual and social victims.[43] Positing Asami as a figure in the line of "the Japanese tradition of the female avenger," Hantke argues that her violence is a challenge toward the "ideology of family" that undergirds the patriarchal and capitalist modern Japanese family.[44] Alongside this contestation of hegemonic values, Hantke views Asami's torture of men as a female rejection of the commercialized but romanticized form of modern love idealized in modern Japanese culture, where in fact family is "already dysfunctional" and "male authority" is "already often undermined."[45] Reading in Asami "a reincarnation" of "the traditional female avenger" as well as "a reaction" toward the patriarchal capitalist family structure of modern Japan, Hantke suggests that "cultural anxieties about the success or failure of modernization" are expressed through the horror and shock conveyed by *Audition*.[46]

In accordance with Hantke, but more specifically, I view the film as concerning itself with the social anxiety of the nineties. I contend that the film presents the ways in which Japanese (corporate) men's anxiety is in conflict with modernized women's desires during the recession. The long-held Japanese dream of being a so-called "family nation" is undermined ideologically by the recession, while, in society,

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[43] Steffen Hantke, "Japanese Horror Under Western Eyes: Social Class and Global
Culture in Miike Takashi's Audition," in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. Jay McRoy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 54-65.
[44] Ibid., 60.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 61.

the female labor force is again victimized due to corporate restructuring. This new socio-economic circumstance led to substantial layoffs of employees at corporations in every sector, which in turn generated numerous social problems and cultural anxiety relating not only to the concept of the "family nation" but to the structure of Japan's nuclear families themselves.[47] In addition, female workers, long considered as supplementary labor in Japanese society, and often employed in part-time or temporary positions, became the first target of cost-cutting by having their work hours reduced or even losing their jobs. When it came to new hires, companies prioritized male over female applicants to fulfill their limited need.[48] For example, the film depicts Aoyama as having a stable job at a company where he has a position of power and is well paid, and living in a wealthy district of Tokyo, In contrast, all of the female characters with whom Aoyama has secret sexual relationships are socially and economically marginalized, taking jobs in which they are submissive to men, and seemingly accepting of their economically lower position in a patriarchal society: a female employee who was sexually used by Aoyama but still pursues him at his company, Asami having worked in a bar as a part-timer and applying for the fake audition, and Aoyama's housekeeper in his home. The film depicts repressed female characters who are less privileged—they are under-educated, have lower-status jobs or no job, and are trapped and traumatized from being left behind by the economic abundance of modern capitalist society. It reflects the social reality that the recession led to even greater inequality between Japanese men and women, both in terms of their working conditions and their household situations.

The very tone of *Audition* is unmistakably shaped by the anxiety caused by the recession in the 1990s. The film's male characters—middle-aged businessmen—are imbued with

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[47] Hashimoto and Traphagan, "Changing Japanese Families," 8.
[48] Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 226.

a defeatism that results from the recession, while they try to reclaim their power and masculinity by reestablishing traditional nuclear families of their own. In one scene, Aoyama meets a friend in the film industry, Yoshikawa Yasuhisa (Kunimura Jun), at a bar to inform him of his decision to pursue remarriage. Before he has a chance to bring up the topic, Yoshikawa mentions the dire condition of Japan's economy as "a survival game or a test of endurance," and adds, "It seems a bright future is ahead but I don't know how long we should wait." In that moment, however, his pessimistic outlook on business changes into annoyance toward some young women laughing and talking aloud in the bar. Yoshikawa complains that all the attractive women have disappeared, while the new ones are "no class, stuck up, and stupid as well." Finally, he ominously declares, "Japan is finished." Put differently, his failing belief in "the family nation" is paralleled by his perception regarding the disappearance of attractive women. Aoyama, however, is unconvinced by Yoshikawa's pessimism about Japanese women. Revealing his decision to get remarried, Aoyoma notes that he himself plans to meet as many women as he can in search of someone, like his deceased wife, who has a job as well as a hobby or activity at which she is reasonably skilled such as playing the piano, singing, or classical Japanese dance, and which thus reinforces her self-confidence and independence without turning her into a popular success or a professional. The two men's dialogue alludes to their assumption that Japan's supposedly impending demise is related to and reflected in women's being "no class, stuck up, and stupid." At the same time, it reveals these middle-aged corporate men's fantasy that if they find a woman with qualities that meet their standard for an ideal wife in the traditional nuclear family, they will regain happiness. Aoyama wants as his spouse a woman who is talented enough to be confident but not so successful that he is unable to control her. Aoyama's expectation for his wife-to-be's talent is evoked

by his belief that women's confidence would bring happiness at "home."

The plot unfolds in the first half of the film with linear realism and at a relatively slow pace, mainly depicting Aoyama's family life and work through Aoyama's perspective. Stable, routine, and highly regimented Japanese men's lives—compartmentalized into family and work—are deployed, and in such a mode, even an unethical and provocative event—a sham audition—held by Aoyama and Yoshikawa is shown as matter-of-factly as if it was a normal scene in the daily routine of corporate men. In the sham audition, the women who respond to the casting call are willing to fulfill any request for the chance to be "the modern day heroine," and they answer even the rude, sometimes sexual and irrelevant questions that Aoyama and Yoshikawa ask, doing their best to satisfy the two men's demands. The mock-casting audition shows, on one hand, the ways in which these two middle-aged men, or, more specifically, two dominant figures who wield a powerful resource, abuse the film production company's support, and at the same time mislead and deceive female participants at the audition for their personal gain. It is a single middle-aged man's desperate but vile attempt to use his social position to find his "perfect wife" by targeting young women who are educated but have been underprivileged within the patriarchal capitalist system in Japan. On the other hand, it reveals how the young women's desire to be successful professional women in modern Japan makes them vulnerable to exploitation by corporate power. The naturalized depiction of the sham audition insinuates that Japanese society is embedded in capitalist corruption as well as patriarchal exploitation.

The film later discloses that there is a disjunction between the society's idealized vision for a wife-to-be, and what the patriarchal capitalist society has generated through its long-standing repression of women. Among all the audition applicants, Aoyama is attracted to 26-year-old Asami, as he is compelled by her reflections in her application essay about her

traumatic childhood; because of an injury she had to give up ballet, in which she had been engaged since childhood. Asami, in her application letter and the audition, seems an agreeably submissive, decent, well-mannered woman, accepting of her position and her painful past in positive ways. During their subsequent date, Asami reveals to Aoyama that in her childhood, she was left in the care of her maternal uncle and his wife when her parents got divorced, but after being severely abused by her aunt, she was sent back to her mother, who by then was remarried to an older disabled man. Understanding her past sympathetically yet deceiving Asami about the original purpose of the audition throughout, Aoyama chooses her as his future wife and invites her on a (supposedly romantic) trip, which for Aoyama apparently represents the fulfillment of a middle-aged man's sexual fantasy. It turns out that this trip is his first encounter with the reality of what he has fantasized.

During the trip, Asami brings Aoyama to her bed, revealing to him the post-burn scars on her thigh. The scars are a result of having been tortured as a child by her stepfather, but she lies that the scars are from self-inflicted wounds. Asami's confessions to Aoyama are distorted with lies through which she is able to hide the ways in which she has been sexually abused and psychologically scarred. What Asami does not reveal is that, although she was indeed a trained ballet dancer, it was by and for her stepfather, who was disabled from having no feet, but who nevertheless owned a very outdated, shabby, small, private ballet school. While her mother was away at work all day, Asami's stepfather not only forced young Asami to dance for him but he tortured her for his sadistic pleasure. His exploitation of her results in her psychopathic violence toward men's bodies whenever socially dominant male figures—her employers or her lover—deceive her. Although Aoyama sees in her the beauty, submissiveness, and decent manners he expects in his ideal wife, the film slowly reveals, in scenes of extreme violence, Asami's repressed anger from her traumatized childhood.

Once Asami exposes her scars, during their ostensibly romantic trip, and consents to a sexual relationship with him the style and content of the film are transformed from those of a melodrama to those befitting a psychological thriller. The editing pace and style of *Audition* starts to be non-linear, fast-paced, and artificially unrealistic after the scene of Asami and Aoyama's trip. The boundaries between imaginary and realistic scenes, and the past and the present, are blurred within the disjunctive editing style. Asami has vanished after their intimate relationship on the trip, leading Aoyama to trace her past. In the film, her past and present are shown as interweaved with Aoyama's imagination, which is shown as filmic reality. In the course of looking for her, Aoyama witnesses—in scenes that could be interpreted as his fantasy or imagination—how Asami is abusing a male victim who is amputated and trapped in her house, his life sustained by eating Asami's vomit. Overlapping with these scenes are moments from her childhood, in which Asami's stepfather asks the young Asami if she would dance for him to avoid being tortured as usual. Rather than dancing for him, Asami hesitantly stretches out her legs and takes her father's torture, which is to burn her legs with heated tongs (Fig. 6).

Hideously grotesque scenes of torture, abuse, and violence—they are either acted upon the child Asami's body or the adult Asami is acting out her rage on the bodies of men—explode across the screen within the disjunctive narrative structure. The abrupt change to sadomasochistic violence, in turn, compels spectators to experience visceral traumas of their own in this particular film-viewing experience. Bennett points out that those who were sexually abused at an early age are "more than being a passive victim," as they "live and continually negotiate the effects of the abuse."[49] The affect of such trauma cannot be conveyed in "moral or medical classification [as it] precedes representation," but it can be expressed by artistic forms that

[49] Bennet, Empathic Vision, 27.

deliver its sensation and create "a discursive framework" that "develop[s] cultural awareness of the issue of sexual abuse."[50] The artistic forms deliver "a condition of confusion" that provides "only fragments of memories, written onto the body."[51] The visual representation of such shocks generates physical imprints on audience members' bodies, and the bodily sensations of those spectators compel them to sense confusing memories of trauma. Underprepared audiences—whose standard expectations have led them to assume *Audition* will follow the relatively conventional format of melodrama—are disoriented by the turn of the film into an extremely violent and cruel horror.

The recurring scenes of Asami's torturing of male bodies in the film manifest the endless repetition of trauma continued in the diegetic and extradiegetic presents. The most gruesome and shocking torture scenes and traumatic memories of Asami come at the end of the film, set in Aoyama's house. From this point, Aoyama, who has pursued Asami throughout the film, turns into an object of her sadistic and meticulous torture—Asami is shown as an invader of Aoyama's home and aggressor toward his body. With this conversion, the film opens up with rapidly-paced scenes of torture, abuse, and sexual perversion that put audience members in unavoidable shock and awe. Aoyama passes out after being drugged, and the following scenes flash across the screen: Aoyama dining with Asami while she recounts her traumatic childhood, then listening to his late wife's warnings about Asami, then being fellated by Asami, who changes into other women successively—his female employee at work and a high-school-aged girl who is a friend of his son's. These lead to scenes in which the child Asami is tortured by her stepfather and the adult Asami slits the throat of that self-same stepfather. All of these scenes are ambiguously framed

[50] Ibid., 28.
[51] Ibid., 29.

as Aoyama's guilt-driven hallucinations regarding exploited women and/or the film's omnipresent narration of the past.

Fig. 6. Still from *Audition*

When Aoyama opens his eyes after having been drugged, Asami—wearing a white pleated skirt that suggests that its wearer is a well-mannered and submissive woman, contrasted with ominously black gloves and apron, not to mention a belt for a set of tools—pulls out her other medical supplies and tools from a big handbag. Explaining to Aoyama that the drug will paralyze him but make him sense pain more acutely, she inserts a needle on his tongue. She then tortures him by poking numerous needles into his stomach and eyes, and then slices off one of his feet with a wire. The visceral quality of the scenes depicting her acts of torture compels spectators, in essence, to experience Aoyama's pain and wounds in the narrative present through their own bodies in the viewing present.

The realistic depiction of physical violence enacted on Aoyama's body and the fragmented dream-like scenes of Asami's past are mixed and compressed in a short period of

screening time. The result does not so much help spectators understand the situation as traumatize them in their viewing experience, yet the parallel scenes suggest that Asami is, in the filmic present, reenacting on male subjects the tortures that had previously been performed on her own body and mind. The psychological pain and wound endured by the young Asami cannot be represented visually or explained verbally, but it is transformed into the visualization of Aoyama's bodily pain caused by his torture at Asami's hands. Scenes from her childhood are again inserted into the sequences of Asami's torture of Aoyama;

Fig. 7. Still from *Audition*

Fig. 8. *Still from Audition*

Fig. 9. Still from *Audition*

Fig. 10. Still from *Audition*

Asami, in the present, is in the process of cutting off Aoyama's foot (Figs. 7&10), while her stepfather, in the past, arouses himself (Fig. 9) while watching his stepdaughter dance beautifully in her pale pink leotard and shoes (Fig. 9). These sequences seem to convey the confused affects of fear, shock, and humiliation, as well as the pleasure of child victims in general—Asami, in this specific instance of the film—who are "sexualized at an early age" by a person to whom they have a close attachment. Asami, in turn, repeats and recreates the pain and abuse by inflicting it on Aoyoma while simultaneously turning him—another supposedly loving and

close man—into her father figure who did not have feet.[52] Asami's torture of others does not bring forth any resolving cathartic moments in relation to her past pain, but rather functions to reveal her traumatic past while conveying the pain of her victim, Aoyama, to spectators. At the same time, the moral ambiguity that Asami might have experienced when she was abused sexually and physically by her stepfather is re-created in spectators through the parallel editing scenes of Asami's violent acts and her traumatic childhood.

Surprisingly, the ending scene of *Audition* comes back to its prior melodramatic tone, adding a bizarre sentimentality through narrative excess that serves as a diversion from the avenging ghost narrative that Hantke suggests in his reading of *Audition*. Asami wants to have Aoyama's "absolute and only love" that is exclusively applied to any others, even to his son Shigehiko. The given reason, in the film, for Asami's torture of Aoyama is that his son's existence makes Aoyama incapable of offering her this exclusive type of love. Ironically, it is this very son who unexpectedly comes home and interrupts Asami's torture of his father and injures her. Pushed down the stairs by Shigehiko, Asami falls from the second floor to the first. The final scenes of the film, after all the horror, are composed of oddly juxtaposed sentimental dialogues between Asami and Aoyama, who both lie on the floor, injured, while calm, smooth instrumental music changes the mood to melancholic and melodramatic. Their lines are repetitions of various dialogues from previous scenes when they were dating.

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[52] Ballet, in general, requires performers to embody and internalize a distinctly western aesthetic and performance technique characterized by an understanding of western classical music. As such, ballet arguably epitomizes the highly sophisticated beauty of Western culture. I posit that Asami's learning of ballet from her footless father thus allegorizes the rootlessness of Japan in its insistent pursuit of modern nation-building that has created a pathology of repressed nostalgia and anxiety.

> Asami: I thought you were a very busy man. I don't know what you do very well. You might think I am desperate. I was longing for your call.
> Aoyama: (Looking at her in the distance, he sheds tears, trembling.)
> Asami: I didn't think I would see you again. Sorry. I am pretty excited. Living alone was a hassle. I have nobody to talk to. You are the first one who is truly warmhearted and tries to accept me and tries to understand who I really am.
> Aoyama: It's hard to overcome that experience but someday you will feel life is wonderful. That's life isn't it?

Following this melodramatic scene, the closing scene of the film shows a blank young Asami sitting alone in an apartment, wearing ballet shoes. After the shocking torture scenes, this insertion of melodramatic dialogue could be read as a scene that reifies the film's critical perspective toward patriarchal capitalist formulations of love and marriage by turning the story into a black comedy. However, considering the last scene of Asami as a child, these snatches of dialogue may, rather, sentimentalize the whole story by changing Asami's violent actions into a reaction by an unloved and unprotected child. In other words, Asami desires back parental love in her relationship with Aoyama. By presenting this sentimental moment, the film once again delivers an ambivalent perspective toward the wronged one's damaging of others.

The nuclear family model, in which women devote themselves to their children's education, and children are subject to disciplining mechanisms that turn them into ideal modern citizens, once characterized the hope of national progress and modernity in post-industrial Japanese society. However, in *Ringu* and *Audition*, women and children are shown as figures entrapped in the past and thus representing discontinuity, but haunting the present and luring other characters to encounter the real, the truth or the past, and traumatic events untold. As I have demonstrated in this paper, the recurring theme of the problematic relations between mother and child in the dysfunctional family of the nineties are a reflection of the repressed problems in the unique cultural and social system of modern Japan. The buried stories

of the forgotten, unmourned women and children are retold in both films through a recursive narrative structure that juxtaposes past events with those in the narrative present. Inaccessible and unknown traumas of the past are not represented in these films, but instead are evoked through grotesque and graphic images. I assert that such traumatic events belong to the past but return to the present, in these films, as allegories of Japan's past attempts to transplant pre-modern elements into the imported, modern western cultural milieu, processes that have been accompanied by psychological scars. This sensibility is created in the long and ongoing traumatic modernization process, which has been shaped out of, and oriented in, the logic for survival—which has meant technological and patriarchal capitalism.

5.
"No Darlin' We're White. He's Dead." Southern Hospitality and Reconfigurations of Discrimination in *True Blood*

Verena BERNARDI

Introduction

The publications of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's (1814-1873) *Carmilla* [1] (1872) and Bram Stoker's (1847-1912) *Dracula* [2] (1987) gave rise to the long literary tradition of using the figure of the vampire as a platform for the discussion of societal issues. Thus it comes as no surprise that in the last twenty years also television shows (e.g. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Being Human*, etc.) have, to an increasing extent, taken the opportunity to not simply entertain but also expose societal problems and injustices of the present and the past.

The HBO series *True Blood* has often been interpreted in terms of its depiction of the vampire as a metaphor for the discussion of gay rights, the gay liberation movement and the struggle the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-Queer+) community has faced in the process. While this is surely a central underlying topic, the series was created in a way which leaves ample room for the discussion of many other issues, such as the question of racism and gender equality in the US, sexuality, religion, the heritage of the Civil War as well as the aftermath of war and terror in a post-9/11 society.

The aim of this paper is to analyze True Blood's depiction of Southern hospitality, a well-known characteristic but also stereotype of Southern culture. Focusing on the series' discussion of the discrepancy between Southern

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[1] Kathleen Costello-Sullivan, ed., *Carmilla By Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu – A Critical Edition* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

[2] Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal, eds., *Dracula Bram Stoker – A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997).

hospitality and discrimination arising from the characters' struggle with their Southern identities, the South is displayed as being othered but also as othering itself through its manners, traditions and inherent attitudes.

True Blood

The American TV series *True Blood* aired from September 7, 2008 to August 24, 2014 and was made up of seven seasons, comprising eighty episodes revolving around the lives of the main-character Sookie Stackhouse as well as the lives of her family and friends which drastically change with the arrival of vampires in Bon Temps. Due to the series being broadcast on HBO (Home Box Office) – a premium cable and satellite television network – the series was granted more freedom in terms of its depiction of sexuality and violence. Based on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries Series* by Charlaine Harris, *True Blood* diverges more and more from the plots of the thirteen novels as the series progresses.

Located in rural northern Louisiana, the fictional small town of Bon Temps plays a central role in the representation of the societal set-up. Its location in the "Deep South of America" renders the town a microcosm for discussions of aforementioned issues, i.e. race and gender equality, with Bon Temps serving as an exemplary depiction of the South and its divergence from popular expectations.

True Blood's characters range from the regular town folk to dominatrix-style lesbians and murderous psychopaths, also regularly exploiting Southern clichés and stereotypes such as the Southern Belle and Gentleman (Sookie and Bill, even if only at first glance), white supremacist rednecks, town drunks or the lone flamboyant homosexual like Lafayette. The characters' outward appearances might be misleading with some searching for belonging and acceptance in a modern society, and others appearing to want to assimilate but having no intention of doing so in earnest. However, as viewers find out throughout the series, it is not only the vampires who are

dangerous, violent and evil but even more so the human population of Bon Temps.

In the first few minutes, viewers are introduced to the underlying topic and essence of the show, as they obtain the position of a silent observer, watching a TV discussion between HBO's Bill Maher (as himself) and American Vampire League spokeswoman Nan Flanagan on a small screen at a gas station:

Example 1

Nan Flanagan: We're citizens. We pay taxes. We deserve basic civil rights just like everyone else.

Bill Maher: Yeah, but, I mean, come on. Doesn't your race have a rather sordid history of exploiting and feeding off innocent people? … For centuries.

Nan Flanagan: Three points. … Number one: Show me documentation. Doesn't exist. Number two: Doesn't YOUR race have a history of exploitation? We never owned slaves, Bill, or detonated nuclear weapons. And most importantly point number three: Now that the Japanese have perfected synthetic blood which satisfies all of our nutritional needs there's no reason for ANYone to fear us. I can assure you that every member of our community is now drinking synthetic blood. That's why we made our existence known. We just want to be part of mainstream society.[3]

As Nan Flanagan states in the last sentence "We just want to be part of mainstream society", it becomes clear throughout the series that it is not only the vampires in *True Blood* who constitute either a separate class, race or species, but also the characters of color as well as characters who display from heteronormativity-divergent sexual orientations. What the members of all these groups have in common is that they do not seem to achieve the same status in society as their non-vampire, white and heterosexual neighbors. How difficult the

[3] Alan Ball, "Strange Love," *True Blood*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Alan Ball, aired September 7, 2008 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD, 1:03.

objective of justice and equality for all still is in a modern world where supernatural creatures are part of everyday, or rather "every night" life, can be seen in the disparities of Southern hospitality and the acceptance of the vampiric newcomers throughout the series. Just as the vampires with their "rather sordid history of exploiting and feeding off innocent people", the American South also hosts its own violent past. Bill Maher's statement can here be interpreted as an accurate description and portrayal of the history of this region, previously mentioned, the South has continuously been othered in literature and popular culture. At the same time, it has also contributed to this process through, for instance, its insistence to the right to carry weapons, the discrimination of the region's non-heteronormative-conforming population as well as the occurrence of race-related hate-crimes and police violence. One could argue that Nan Flanagan's statement of the vampires' quest to be "part of mainstream society" also rings true for the American South as it voices the Southern states' reputed yearning to be a fully recognized equal member of the community of the United States.

True Blood and (Southern) Gothic

The TV series *True Blood* is known first and foremost for its overly dramatic and exaggerated depiction of sexuality and violence in small town life. Adopted as almost common practice for a number of television series, this plethora of clichés and stereotypes gives viewers the choice of either buying into the action on screen, or adopting a more objective perspective. It can be argued that this exaggeration then functions as a means of illuminating societal issues through a lens of irony and dark humor.

As the Gothic genre is celebrated for its allowance of multiple interpretations of its texts and as "a literature of fear,

ambiguity, and transgression,"[4] it – and especially the Southern Gothic sub-genre – is ideal for a show such as *True Blood*. The series' location in northern Louisiana as well as the fact that a great part of the plot takes place at night – when the vampires come out to play – already create a certain mystification. Especially the main character Sookie tends to put herself in situations common for the Gothic genre. Seemingly fulfilling all characteristics stereotypical for the damsel in distress in the Gothic genre, Sookie is a pretty, blond, naïve young (virgin) waitress with the gift of telepathy which leads to her othering in Bon Temps' society as being "crazy as a bed bug."[5] However, as the series progresses, Sookie regularly subverts the cliché of the "Gothic heroine"[6] who runs away from danger in a white gown when she for instance runs across the cemetery to Bill's house at night, only wearing a white nightgown. Similarly, the main character seems to provoke dangerous situations as for example when Sookie takes the vampire Bill to a walk across a cemetery at night[7] or when she goes to the vampire bar *Fangtasia* wearing a white dress with red floral print showing lots of cleavage, giving the vampires an unobstructed, almost deliberate view not only of her bosom but also her neck.

As Punter and Byron point out, the combination of traditional Gothic elements with "the particular concerns of the American South" leads to "an emphasis on the grotesque,

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[4] Charles L. Crow, "Fear, Ambiguity, and Transgression: The Gothic Novel in the United States," in *A Companion to the American Novel*, ed. Alfred Bendixen (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 129-146.

[5] Ball, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 1.

[6] Katie Saulnier, "From Virtuous Virgins to Vampire Slayers: The Evolution of the Gothic Heroine from the Early Gothic to Modern Horror," *Watcher Junior* 4.1 (2009), http://www.watcherjunior.tv/04/saulnier.php.

[7] Brian Buckner, "Escape from Dragon House," *True Blood*, season 1, episode 4, directed by Michael Lehmann, aired September 7, 2008 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD.

the macabre and, very often, the violent"[8] as can be seen in the many instances of aggression and violence between the series' humans and vampires. In season 1, viewers are exposed to both, instances of human as well as vampiric violence. Not only are viewers introduced to three vampires who keep humans as pets and food resource until they tire of them and eventually drain and kill them, but we also see humans who take the law into their own hands, simply setting these vampires' "nest" on fire, ridding the world of them for good. Aside from human-vampire aggression, however, viewers also observe human-human aggression as when Matt and Michelle Rattray beat Sookie in the forest at night, until only Bill's interception and blood can save her from certain death.

The combination of the gothic genre and the use of the vampire as a destabilizing figure of identity form the ideal foundation for the discussion of societal issues and the negotiation of various cultural conflicts. Needless to say, vampires are known for their usefulness in the analysis of race, as can be seen in the anti-Semitic reading of Stoker's *Dracula*[9]. *True Blood* takes up this tradition by drawing a concept of discrimination in various forms, revealing that past mistreatments of certain groups are still present and that society has not yet learned its lesson from history but rather continues to be prejudiced towards anything that seems new, unknown or deviant.

I argue that in following gothic traditions, *True Blood* offers a platform where, as Levina and Bui state, "society can safely represent and address anxieties of its time."[10] As Robin Wood sets forth "culture and society dictates that which we must repress" and it is this "surplus repression […] shaped by the demands of a capitalist patriarchal society" which "makes

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[8] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 116-17.

[9] Judith Halberstam, "Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'," *Victorian Studies* 36:3 (1993), 333-352.

[10] Marina Levina and Diem-My T Bui, eds., introduction to *Monster Culture in the 21st Century* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1.

us monogamous, heterosexual, and bourgeois."[11] Wood also proclaims that "repression is closely linked to the concept of the Other […] as representational of those characteristics that we repress in order to fit into the cultural normative regime."[12] Skal asserts "that the history of monster films is first and foremost a history of the culture that produced these monster images."[13] The vampires in *True Blood* are free from the here mentioned societal constraints. In contrast to the human race, for vampires it is normal to give in to their urges and desires without being reprimanded by members of their species. While even today in a modern world, topics such as homosexuality are still an issue, the pansexuality of many of the series' vampires, is just one of the perks of being undead. Unlike the humans of Bon Temps for example who judge Sookie's virile brother Jason for his promiscuity, vampires do not feel the need to differentiate between male and female sexual partners, however often these partners change or in which relationship they stand. These relationships reach from seemingly regular relationships between lovers for instance to maker-progeny or progeny-progeny relationships which in human terms could be compared to sexual relations between father/mother and child or among siblings. The unconstrained and uninhibited sexuality in *True Blood* is one characteristic of vampires which lets them appear to be a more open-minded, practical, maybe even in certain respects more progressive race than the humans. Especially in season one, consorting with a vampire proves to be deadly for humans. When Bill tries to make Sookie aware of the danger of her socializing with a vampire he says "We don't have human values like you." Sookie, instead of being afraid, simply counters this warning with the statement "Well humans turn on them who trust them, too."[14] Here Sookie does not only

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[11] Qtd. in ibid., 4.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 5.
[14] Alan Ball, *True Blood*, season 1 episode 1, 26:28.

allude to the history of the South when slave-owners oftentimes tended to physically and psychologically abuse their slaves, but she also refers to and foreshadows frequent occurrences throughout the series when her fellow residents of Bon Temps turn against her brother, herself or each other in general. The American South in *True Blood* can here be seen as what Robin Wood in *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* defines as "the Other" whereas he states "[o]therness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with […] either by rejecting […] or […] by assimilating it."[15] I argue that the series shows that the South's adherence to traditions and manners creates a sense of community among its practitioners where certain issues, be that sexual orientation or the right to rights, maybe even this region's history itself need to be repressed to uphold tradition and order. *True Blood* suggests that this region does not need monsters. Instead it appears to be a double-edged sword of its own with the shadow of its past still looming over it. I assert that the maintenance of "Old South" behavior and ways of thinking which are represented in the series uphold a modified version of the tradition of "separate but equal" with the South being part of the United States but still distancing itself from the rest of the nation through for instance its compliance with manners and traditions. The fictional small-town of Bon Temps in *True Blood* thus serves as an in-between-space or contact-zone where the old and the new South try to come together.

True Blood and Southern Hospitality

As the past two decades have shown, American vampires and other supernaturals tend to inhabit regions which somehow set themselves apart. Here one can think of examples, such as Stephenie Meyer's vampires and werewolves who live in the

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[15] Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan… And Beyond: A Revised and Expanded Edition of the Classic Text* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 65-66.

constantly overcast small town of Forks in the state of Washington or L. J. Smith's vampires (*The Vampire* Diaries) who mix and mingle with the population of Mystic Falls, Virginia, a seemingly average small town which is situated on so-called ley lines causing it to be a supernatural hotspot. Falling in line with the examples of Forks, WA and Mystic Falls, VA, the American South with its distinct history of slavery and the Civil War, and its swamps and mysterious wilderness (e.g. Southern moss) constitutes the ideal location for a story about vampires and other supernatural creatures. New Orleans in particular, with its notorious historical connection to voodoo and the practice of magic (witches, etc.), has been depicted in fiction as a mecca for the non-human population of the United States. Movie- as well as television series-vampires oftentimes find themselves in New Orleans at least once during their screen time (e.g. Louis and Lestat in *Interview with a Vampire*, Bill and Eric in *True Blood*, Stefan and Damon Salvatore in *The Vampire Diaries*) as this large and vibrant Southern city appears to be a great place to blend in or hide in plain sight. However, the South is not only known for its distress and connection to magic but, especially its rural regions are famous throughout the world for the people's friendliness, politeness and hospitality. This binary perception is what really accounts for the appeal of the South and plays a central role in *True Blood*. As political debates, e.g. the removal of the Confederate flag from the capitol of Charleston, SC, but also the South's self-advertisement show, the South does not appear to be capable to or maybe does not want to shake off its history and appears to continuously maybe even consciously struggle against this region's entry to the modern world. Yet, this detachment from the rest of the U.S. however, is what lends this region a certain mystification and excitement. Tourists are fascinated by the traditions and manners which, as McPherson explains, "are repeatedly framed as the glue that binds the South together,

distinguishing it from other regions."[16] In stark contrast to tourists' perceptions of these manners and traditions however, McPherson defines southern hospitality as "a carefully manipulated stage set of moonlight, magnolias, and manners" stating that the "southern hospitality is a performance, a masquerade, an agreed-on social fiction, albeit a powerful one with material effects."[17] Similarly, obliterating this well-known and well-exploited characteristic of the South, Roberts also construes southern hospitality as being "all about personal and cultural performance – with the south […] representing itself as special, chosen, a fav[o]red region congratulating itself on not having the problems associate with the rest of the country."[18] Now, in *True Blood*, the South does face the same problems as the rest of the country. Vampires have come "out of the coffin" and – even though a little later – also find their way to Bon Temps in the backwoods of the southern states.

As Jim Goad states, "the South has become America's cultural nigger rendered in geographical terms,"[19] Graham infers that the South is "[t]he 'dark' underbelly of the nation, the reversed image in the mass-media mirror, the South was and is America's repellent yet all too compelling Other."[20] This "othering" of the South culminates in the exploitation of this region's particularities in popular culture and achieves "a politically recharged setting for the nation's ongoing melodrama of race and social class."[21]

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[16] Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagined* South (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003), 150.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Carol M. Megehee and Deborah F Spake, "Decoding southern culture and Hospitality," *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 2,2 (2008), 98.
[19] Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 87.
[20] Allison Graham, "The South in Popular Culture," in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, eds. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 335.
[21] Ibid.

The notion of being the "repellent yet all too compelling Other"[22] attributed to the South also adequately describes the reception of vampires in *True Blood*. While the locals of Bon Temps are afraid of the "newcomers" (Bon Temps faces its first vampire in Bill Compton, even though vampires have been out of the coffin for two years), they are at the same time fascinated. With "vampire Bill's" arrival, life as the locals know it is over and it is then when vampires and humans are forced to interact with each other that the struggle of identity in this region becomes obvious. Viewers gain insight into the still prevalent problematic of old vs. new South mentalities through the series allusions to discrimination and events in African American history. Not only does *True Blood* introduce the vampires' quest for "basic civil rights"[23] within the first two minutes of the show, but the main character Sookie also mentions to vampire Bill that her boss Sam "supports the vampire rights amendment,"[24] alluding, as I argue, to the Reconstruction Amendments in the mid-19th century, African American Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 60s, or the LGBTQ+ community's fight for the abolition of the Federal Marriage Amendment in the early 21st century. Bill sarcastically replies to Sookie's affirmation of Sam's good will, "How progressive of him," hinting at the series' later exposure of bigotry and the feigned friendliness and hospitality towards the vampire race. This pretense of friendliness with its concealed bigotry becomes more apparent early on in season one when Sam and Sookie argue about prejudices towards and the maltreatment of vampires:

Example 2

Sookie: And frankly Sam I'm surprised at you. I thought you were FOR the vampire rights amendment.

Sam: Well I think they should be able to have their own bars, I just don't think people ought to go there.

Sookie: So you just wanna turn to the days of separate but equal?

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Alan Ball, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 1, 1:03.

[24] Ibid., 16:57.

Sam: I don't give a shit about equal. We can give them more than we got. Just as long as everything is separate.[25]

This is just one of the many instances in the series when history seems to repeat itself and the parochialism familiar to the South become apparent. Looking at the series' clichéd depiction of Southern hospitality, we find an example of the new, more open-minded and progressive vs. old, traditional South in the two characters of Adele Stackhouse (Sookie and Jason's grandmother) and Maxine Fortenberry (Hoyt's mother). Both women exhibit certain similarities as they are natives of Bon Temps and are well-known and respected members of the town's community. Moreover, Adele as well as Maxine have both raised children as single parents, with Adele taking care of her grandchildren after the tragic accident and deaths of their parents, and Maxine raising Hoyt without a father who committed suicide when Hoyt was ten years old. Although they do not belong to the same generation (Maxine seems to be in her fifties while Adele is in her mid-seventies), both women are representatives of the older part of Bon Temps society.

As can be seen throughout season one, Adele Stackhouse is the poster-child of a Southern Belle, deeply caring for her friends and family, constantly taking care of the people close to her and always ready to cater to her guests' needs. The following short transcribed excerpt of episode two depicts a situation where Adele treats Tara, Sookie's best friend, as if she, too, were her granddaughter. She hugs and kisses her hello when she visits and immediately tells her to sit down while she makes a fresh pot of coffee.

Example 3

Tara: Good morning, Ms Stackhouse.
Adele: Good morning Tara. (*Kisses her on the cheek.*) You sit down I'll make a new pot.
Tara: 'right.[26]

[25] Brian Buckner, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 4, 26:56.

Highlighting Adele's genuine friendliness, the scene is shown in warm light with the sun shining through the kitchen window. The warmth of the situation and especially Adele's behavior towards Tara is amplified by Tara's facial expression. When she interacts with Adele, Tara looks happy and loved; once she sits down next to Sookie reality seems to hit and Tara's expression changes to exhausted and sad. Similarly to this situation, Adele, again being the perfect host, shows her grandson Jason the same love she did Tara when he appears only minutes later. Adele immediately asks him to sit as she sets out to "fix […] breakfast" for him.

Example 4

Adele *(enters the room)*:	You will never believe what happened! Oh hey Jason! You sit down.
Jason:	Yes.
Adele:	I'll fix you breakfast.[27]

Both instances present Adele as an extremely hospitable person who cannot help herself but care for others. This caring is either given in the form of food or of words of advice for Sookie as when she kindly discusses her granddaughter's fears and discomforts of a possible relationship with "vampire Bill" in later episodes.

Similarly to these examples, Adele also presents the picture-perfect, progressive Southern woman when it comes to her behavior towards strangers. When she meets the vampire Bill Compton for the first time she is warm, caring and open-minded. In fact, she even seems delighted by Sookie's love-interest in Bill, not ever stating any concern about the "interraciality" of their potential relationship. When Sookie asks her "Aren't you gonna tell me to be careful?" Adele simply answers, "You're always careful, Sookie. About what counts. And I can depend on that. Isn't that right?"[28]

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[26] Alan Ball, "The First Taste," *True Blood*, season 1, episode 2, directed by Scott Winant, aired September 14, 2008 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD, 21:36.

[27] Alan Ball, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 2, 23:20.

[28] Ibid., 28:38.

When she invites Bill into her home, Adele is a polite and friendly hostess who promptly offers sandwiches to her guests, including Bill. The moment she remembers that he cannot eat regular food, Adele is sincerely embarrassed and apologizes for her faux-pas showing great manners and consideration for other people's feelings. Adele does not distinguish between people, she does not assign categories. Instead she treats everyone kindly and with the respect they deserve, even if she disagrees with them.

Example 5

Adele *(offers Bill a sandwich. Realizes he doesn't eat solid food.)* [*Deep intake of breath.*]: Oh Mr. Compton. Of cour-. Of course. You- You don't- … eh. Well. I'm s- I'm sorry.[29]

In stark contrast to Adele Stackhouse who – as I argue – can be understood as representing "new South" mentalities, the character of Maxine Fortenberry, however, functions as a representative of the "old South" thinking and behavior. Not only is Maxine extremely prejudiced and does not hide her feelings when it comes to her dislike of vampires, she is also a sensation-seeking, manipulative woman who enjoys other people's hardships and no one can be safe from her gossip.

Both women, Adele and Maxine, represent the stereotype of Southern friendliness and hospitality. Maxine loves her son just as much as Adele loves her grandchildren; however, while Adele's friendliness and hospitality (also towards vampire Bill) are honest, Maxine's display of these attributes towards anyone but her son (although she also manipulates him) is rather "a performance, a masquerade."[30]

This feigned Southern hospitality becomes especially vivid in episode 6 of season 1 when Maxine attends Adele's wake after Adele was brutally murdered. To keep up the appearance of grieving the loss of "an angel sent from heaven" as she refers to Adele, Maxine brings a tuna-cheese casserole to the gathering. Supporting the stereotype of

[29] Ibid., 31:22.
[30] McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 150.

Southerners compensating everything with food, this appears to be a traditional offering in Bon Temps as Lafayette comments "another one?" when Tara sarcastically states that "nothing says you're sorry like a tuna-cheese casserole."[31]

As the viewers can gather from Sookie's mindreading abilities, Maxine's actions and intentions do not coincide. In fact, Maxine does not attend the wake to show emotional support, but was hoping to see the scene of the murder and maybe even some residual blood. When she tells Sookie that everyone is going to "miss her [grandmother] *so much*,"[32] she is at the same time thinking how extremely disappointing it is that there is no indication or evidence left of the gruesome event. As Sookie is still in shock and thus in no shape to block out other people's thoughts, she overhears Maxine thinking "I heard they almost cut off her head. I don't see any blood. Should've gotten here sooner. Maybe I should've brought my Red Velvet Cake instead."[33]

As is visible in this scene, Maxine Fortenberry is blatantly intrusive. Not only does she not care about other people's feelings, she is also extremely prejudiced and hateful only pretending to be friendly and accommodating when she can gain an advantage from her deliberate deception of others.

When her son Hoyt talks to his mother about his girlfriend, the newly turned Jessica, Maxine brazenly informs him that she disapproves of this relationship (season 4, episode 9). This disagreement represents the first step towards Hoyt's eventual emancipation from his mother's influence and Old South attitudes. Until this point Hoyt did as his mother said even though he oftentimes does not agree with her or feels irritated or even embarrassed by her actions. In comparison to his prejudiced mother, Hoyt is a very open-minded young man, representing "new South" mentalities in

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[31] Raelle Tucker, "Cold Ground," *True Blood*, season 1, episode 6, directed by Nick Gomez, aired October 12, 2008 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD, 12:19.
[32] Ibid., 12:42.
[33] Raelle Tucker, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 6, 12:46.

contrast to his mother's old-way thinking. The following transcript shows that Maxine Fortenberry is opposed to anything and anyone different from her worldview.

Example 6

Hoyt: Why do you have so much hate in you?
Maxine: I don't.
Hoyt: That's a flat lie.
Maxine: Who do you think you're talking to?
Hoyt: My moma … who hates Methodists.
Maxine: I got my reasons.
Hoyt: And Catholics.
Maxine: Just priests … and nuns.
Hoyt: African-Americans.
Maxine: Hush! … That's a secret.
Hoyt: People who don't take care of their gardens or people who park their trucks up on their lawn. Or ladies who wear red shoes.
Maxine: It looks cheap.
Hoyt: Families with lots of kids. Or chequered curtains … and cats … and dogs … and bait. Every girl that I ever liked. … And the more that I like'em the more do you hate'em.
Maxine: I simply object to a girlfriend who will kill you and eat you. I think that's reasonable.
Hoyt: You don't even know her. … FULL of hate! … I see you now
Maxine: Well it's not my fault. It's the way I was raised up.[34]

As becomes clear in this exchange, Hoyt – unlike his mother – is not the product of his upbringing although Maxine surely was not a role model in terms of open-mindedness and acceptance. While Maxine attributes her animosity and bigotry to "the way [she] was raised up," Hoyt managed to attain a much more tolerant attitude towards life and what is happening around him. This example clearly shows what "a carefully manipulated stage" [35] the concept of southern hospitality can be. Maxine is well aware of what kind of

[34] Nancy Oliver, "I Will Rise Up," *True Blood*, season 2, episode 9, directed by Scott Winant, aired August 16, 2009 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD, 25:25.
[35] McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 150.

behavior is expected of a woman in the South, showing appropriate reactions in different situations, e.g. when she attends Adele's wake, however, she obviously feels differently in reality, only keeping up appearances to not lose face in society.

Although her son made her aware of the wrongness of her discriminatory behavior, Maxine does not seem to be able or maybe does not want to shake off her ingrained prejudices as is obvious when Hoyt invites her to Merlotte's to introduce Jessica to her. Not only does his mother arrive twenty minutes late but she also verbally offends Jessica and openly states her dislike of and bias towards their relationship.

Example 7

Maxine: I surely wish I could meet your people. See what your family is like.

Hoyt: Moma!

Jessica: Somebody made me a vampire against my will, Ms Fortenberry. I don't have a family anymore.… Except your wonderful son.

Maxine: I'm very sorry for you. That wasn't fair. But Hoyt has a bright future ahead of him ... and by bright

I mean IN THE SUN. … If you think I'm gonna let him wander around all hours of the night for the rest of his life with an orphan vampire, you got another thing coming.[36]

As also in the previous examples, Maxine Fortenberry feigns her friendliness without actually meaning it. Maxine's reaction to and sympathy for Jessica's explanation that she does not have a family anymore because she was turned into a vampire against her will is only a masquerade, a conditioned response to a sad event or statement, a social convention. Sookie explains the necessity of such fabricated responses when she informs Bill about the murder of her coworker Dawn. When Bill simply asks how Dawn was murdered Sookie scolds him "Say you're sorry!" which greatly confuses him. After his response, "Excuse me?" she then explains, "You wanna learn to fit in with people, you gotta say you're sorry. You don't

[36] Nancy Oliver, *True Blood*, season 2, episode 9, 35:06.

even have to mean it. Lord knows they don't most of the time."[37] This statement can be interpreted as a summary of Southern hospitality and friendliness supporting Robert's argument that Southern hospitality is "all about personal and cultural performance"[38].

Both the conversation between Hoyt and his mother as well as Maxine's first encounter with Jessica can be seen as reminiscent of recent history when interracial relationships or marriage were considered taboo. As Maxine Fortenberry explains at one point, "Well it's not my fault. It's the way I was raised up", she is referring to the older population of Bon Temps which still frowns upon mixed-race relationships. Although marriage between people of different race and ethnicity is no longer illegal, the relationships between vampires and humans in *True Blood* pointedly remind viewers of the still prevailing discourse of discrimination and injustice in the South. At one point, Tara explains to the town sheriff and detective, "people think just because we got vampires out in the open now, race isn't the issue no more. But you've ever seen the way folks look at mixed couples in this town? Race may not be the hot button issue anymore but it's still a button you can push on people."[39] This shows that not even a society in which the presence of vampires and supernatural creatures has become normalcy has been able to overcome prejudices. During Bill's talk at the meeting of the Descendants of the Glorious Dead many people in the audience regard him with wariness or even blatant dislike. When Arlene's little son Cory says to his mother "Mama. He's so white." Arlene explains to him, "No, darling. We're white. He's dead." [40] As this statement shows, Tara is correct in her allegation that race still is an issue. Interestingly this short conversation between

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[37] Brian Buckner, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 4, 26:33.
[38] Mehegee et al., "Decoding," 98.
[39] Brian Buckner, *True Blood*, season 1, episode 4, 16:55.
[40] Alexander Woo, "Sparks Fly Out," *True Blood*, season 1, episode 5, directed by Daniel Minahan, aired October 5, 2008 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010), DVD, 20:43.

Arlene and her son points towards an attitude that not only discriminates against another race, as in the vampire race, but also against skin color as has played and continues to play a defining role in Southern life and living. Especially in the American South, as has lately become more obvious again (see Ferguson, MO (2014), Baltimore, MD (2015), Prairie View, TX (2015)), racism is still rampant and possibly part of this region's subconscious. While *True Blood* depicts a time and society where race issues have given way to the discrimination of vampires instead, the issue of discrimination is still predominant even though redirected towards another minority group. Although the series displays an undercurrent of social criticism, it also overtly alludes to the topic of discrimination and events in African American and/or LBGTQ+ past but also recent history.

Conclusion

As my analysis of short film sequences of *True Blood* shows, the depiction of Southern hospitality and friendliness in the series provides clear insight into the South's still ongoing battle with its past. The resulting attitudes and beliefs continue to be ingrained in people's consciousness even, or maybe especially, in a twenty-first century world facing new encounters and challenges. In this, for some uncanny, for others exciting, new situation *True Blood*'s display of Southern hospitality serves as an indicator for people's 'true' feelings and stance towards what is seen as different or unknown. This struggle of Old versus New South leads to the construction of the South as "the Other," which then actively sets itself apart from the rest of the nation through its adherence to traditions and social conventions. Whether meant 'honestly' or used as performative acts, traditions and manners are a crucial part of Southern culture, and it is therefore not surprising that *True Blood* addresses this and uses cultural stereotype to point out larger societal issues such as the still prevalent struggle for freedom of choice and equality.

The presentation of the community's diverse and controversial reactions to the arrival of vampires in Bon Temps functions as a reminder of continuing inequities and discrimination for African Americans and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly to the African American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s and the LGBTQ+ struggle in the 21st century, the vampires in *True Blood* constitute a minority group which fights for civil rights. The treatment of vampires as outsiders, simply because of their deviance from what is considered to be "the norm," functions as a lens to the prevailing and diverse discourse of discrimination, injustice and racial profiling.

6.
¡Tigre Blanco, héroe del Barrio!: Living and Dying Latina/o in a Superhero World

Luis SAENZ DE VIGUERA ERKIAGA

(Not-so-)Secret Origin of a Latina/o Genealogy!

In a world where the superheroic characters from Marvel Comics and DC Comics, the two major comic book publishers in the United States, are taking over mainstream media via film, TV shows, and video-games, it seems more relevant than ever to look at the way in which these comic book fantasies deal with diversity and the representation of minorities. Currently, one of the versions of Spider-man (the one initially operating in the "Ultimate" Marvel Universe, as opposed to the regular "611" Marvel Universe) is of mixed African-American/Latino origin, joining a growing cast of characters [1] that represent aspects of the diverse social identities that fall under the Latina/o category. Acknowledging that this effort to diversify these universes of fantasy is a popular culture response to the changing demographics of the country, as well as to the demands of the national and global markets, it is necessary to begin tracing a genealogy of the ways in which a particular minority, Latinas/os, has been portrayed in superhero comic books. We propose to do this by taking a look at how the first attempt at introducing a Latino superhero in American comic books reflected the stereotypes and misapprehensions with which the dominant White/Anglo group viewed Latina/o populations. Marc Singer mentions how the superhero genre has a "long history of excluding, trivializing, or 'tokenizing'

[1] Including new characters as well as iterations of previously existing ones, such as: Blue Beetle, The Question, and Vibe, from DC Comics; or, from Marvel Comics, Araña/Spider-girl, Victor Mancha from *The Runaways*, and Ava Ayala, the female White Tiger character from the *Ultimate Spider-man* animated TV series.

minorities to create numerous minority super-heroes who are marked purely for their race."[2] This paper will, in fact, discuss racial stereotypes in regards to the character in question, as well as how he served as a blueprint for later representations of Latinas/os in comic books.

The honor and distinction of being the first Latino superhero in a comic book by one of the major American publishers belong to Hector Ayala, the White Tiger, created by writer Bill Mantlo and artist George Pérez for *The Deadly Hands of Kung-fu #19* in December 1975. *Deadly Hands* was part of a black and white magazine line published by Marvel during the 1970s, aimed at more mature experimentation with form and topics, and an attempt to expand sales in the magazine market.[3] On issue #19, the spotlight of the series would shift from a multi-ethnic cast that included Anglo, African-American and Chinese martial artists to Ayala, a young, inauspicious Puerto Rican, who accidentally stumbles upon three mystic amulets that transform him into the super-powered White Tiger.[4] Bill Mantlo, the creator most closely associated with Ayala, scripted his misadventures in twelve issues of *The Deadly Hands of Kung-fu*, as a guest star in two issues of, respectively, *The Human Fly* and *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-man,* and, subsequently, as a secondary character in 14 later issues of *Peter Parker*. It is worth noting that Mantlo, who would in the mid- to late 1980s study to become a public defender in the Bronx, remained the White Tiger's sole writer between 1975 and 1979, continuing the

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[2] Singer, Marc, "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race," *African American Review* 36, no. 1 (2002): 107.

[3] Marvel Comics, "Glossary: Curtis Magazines," accessed April 11, 2012, http://marvel.wikia.com/Glossary:Curtis_Magazines.

[4] White Tiger is the name that the character takes on when he wears the amulets, which, shaped like a tiger's head and paws, transform his clothes into a white outfit that covers all his skin. The name bears an uncanny resemblance to the Black Panther, another one of Marvel's characters (see note 5), but it also follows standard comic book naming conventions (color+descriptive noun).

character's story over time and in those different series. Afterwards, Ayala only had a few significant appearances in *Peter Parker* in 1981, and quickly disappeared into oblivion until Brian Michael Bendis brought him back for a few issues of *Daredevil* in 2003, only to kill him off.

Commercially, the introduction of the White Tiger could be seen as a logical next step after the proliferation of African-American characters in comic books published by Marvel and DC in the late 1960s and the 1970s.[5] As a

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[5] Aldama, Frederick Luis, *Your Brain on Latino Comics: From Gus Arriola to Los Bros Hernandez* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2009), 29-30, accessed April 10, 2012, Proquest Ebrary; Brown, Jeffrey A., *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2001), 4; Nama, Adilifu, *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2011), 17-29, 39-58, accessed March 12, 2016, ProQuest Ebrary. A list of the most popular black superheroes and superheroines in mainstream comics would have to begin with Marvel Comics' T'Challa, the Black Panther. He was introduced by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in *Fantastic Four* #52 (July 1966) as the King of Wakanda, a fantastically advanced African country. He would appear as a guest star in different series, joining The Avengers for a while until he starred in his own adventures in *Jungle Action*, from issue #5 (July 1973) to #24 (November 1976). In January 1977, he would be given his own title, which would initially last fifteen issues, although it has been then relaunched several times over the past few decades to varying degrees of commercial success. In *Captain America* #117 (September 1969), Sam Wilson, The Falcon, would become both the first African American superhero in mainstream comics, as well as the title's hero's sidekick. In the December 1971 issue of *Green Lantern* (#87), John Stewart, an African-American architect and former marine was introduced. He would become the occasional substitute of Hal Jordan, the white, Anglo Green Lantern. Although he would later gain more prominence as a character, it should be noted that, throughout the 1970s, he only appeared in four different comic books. Luke Cage, Power Man, was introduced in the first issue of his own series, *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire*, in June 1972. Jericho Drumm, Brother Voodoo, was introduced in *Strange Tales #169* (September 1973), series in which he lasted for four issues, until the focus was switched to another character beginning with issue #174. In 1975, Dr, Bill Foster, a supporting character that had been created in 1966 and worked as a lab assistant to Henry Pym (Giant-man, one of the founders of The Avengers), would become an African-American version of Giant-man, enjoying his own title,

consequence of the financial success of "Blaxploitation" movies in the early 1970s, the mainstream comic book market witnessed the emergence of periodicals featuring African-American characters, created by white writers and artists,[6] under titles that clearly identified these characters in racial terms, such as *Black Panther, Black Goliath,* or *Black Lightning*.[7] As Rob Lendrum points out, 80% of "Blaxploitation" films were directed by white men, and "[s]imilarly, white writers script the Black superheroes in comic books almost exclusively," taking their thematic, linguistic, and aesthetic cues from the films themselves.[8] This problem will similarly afflict White Tiger, although, significantly, both Mantlo and Pérez were born in New York City, where the character's adventures will take place, and, more importantly, Pérez, although born in the United States mainland, is Puerto Rican, like Ayala himself.

Turning Hector Ayala into one of the main characters of *Deadly Hands* could be seen as a way for Marvel to diversify their comic book line and enlarge their market by offering something for the growing Latino community, while, at the

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Black Goliath, for five issues during 1976. 1975 also saw the debut of Ororo Munroe, AKA Storm, a member of the Uncanny X-Men in the pages of *Giant-size X-Men #1* (May 1975) . In 1977, Black Lightning was created in a series that carried his name, and which would last eleven issues. A pattern can be appreciated from this brief genealogy: black characters were seen initially as sidekicks and iterations of white characters, and, once they went beyond playing supporting roles and moved on to their own titles, the lifespan of their series was rather short. The exception for this rule would be Luke Cage, who was able to hold his title for 66 issues until Iron Fist, a white martial artist, was added to it in *Power Man and Iron Fist* #67 in 1981.

[6] Ghee, Kenneth, "'Will the 'Real' Black Superheroes Please Stand up?!': A Critical Analysis of the Mythological and Cultural Significance of Black Superheroes," in *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*, eds. Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L Jackson II (London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 232.

[7] Lendrum, Rob, "The Super Black Macho, One Baaad Mutha: Black Superhero Masculinity in 1970's Mainstream Comic Books," *Extrapolation* 46, no. 3 (2005): 360.

[8] Ibid., 363-364.

same time, catering to fans of the early 1970s Kung Fu/Bruce Lee mania.[9] The allegedly more mature, magazine-like *Deadly Hands* was not subject to the Comics Code Authority, through which the comic book industry regulated the contents of their own comics. This granted the creative team the opportunity to dwell into social issues at a deeper level than the regular color comic books at the time. Mantlo, with the help of a variety of artists, will use Hector Ayala to tackle problems such as unemployment, drug addiction, class and racial conflict, and educational inequality within the context of the fictionalized New York City of the Marvel Universe. However, Mantlo's social concerns collide with the narrative necessities of the action/martial arts genre that the magazine was dedicated to, as well as with the limits of an editorial line that, while providing some room for experimentation, was concerned, ultimately, with profit.

Thus, the first striking characteristic from Hector Ayala's tenure at *Deadly Hands* is how he, as well as the stories in which he appears, will perform the contradictions from which they both emerge, by falling into inconsistency and incoherence, as we will see, while missing the chance to become a positive symbol (for his community inside the graphic narrative, but historically, too, in regards to Latina/o representation in mainstream comic books). In the first issues of *Deadly Hands,* specifically, while he is being developed as a character, the amount of non-sequiturs, plot holes and contradictions that surround him is staggering. A possible explanation might be that while attempting to represent social conflicts and distresses surrounding the location of Puerto Ricans within mainland US economy and society, the subject matter might have proven excessive to the constrains of the form. Tensions between the reality of these problems, the stereotypes of Puerto Ricans that find their way into the stories, and, finally, the requirements of the action/martial arts

[9] Rhoades, Shirrel, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008, 106.

genre all coalesce into a problematic, schizophrenic narrative centered on a character that is defined by a negative identity, by his not being able to be and act like a non-otherized – non-chromatic – superhero. Furthermore, Ayala and his support cast become characters in constant crisis, under siege of the tension and excess arising between narrative inconsistencies, stereotypes deployed in order to represent the characters as Puerto Rican racialized others, and social issues connected to the colonial condition of Puerto Ricans in the mainland.

Puerto Ricans in NYC: Coloniality and Symbolic Capital

To approach these tensions and the excess they generate around the figure of the White Tiger, the context from which this white-clad figure arises needs to be discussed. The character's background can be identified by three factors: hegemonic representations of Puerto Ricans in the mainland, the social and economic conditions under which said Puerto Ricans lived, and, finally, the way in which comic books construct Hector Ayala and his social and cultural context.

By the early 1970s, Puerto Ricans lacked symbolic capital within the mainland, in general, but especially in New York City, the location where the creators of White Tiger, and the character himself, lived. Ramón Grosfoguel takes the concept of "symbolic capital" from Pierre Bourdieu, and applies it to the racial hierarchy that structures social space in New York City. Within this context, symbolic capital is understood as "the capital of prestige and honor of each [social] group."[10] One of the consequences of mapping the city around this capital is that "groups at the bottom of the racial/ethnic hierarchy have a low or negative symbolic capital – that is, no prestige – and their identities are usually tied to a negative/bad public image. These groups suffer discrimination in the labor market, finding barriers to

[10] Grosfoguel, Ramón, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 152, accessed June 18, 2014, Proquest Ebrary.

economic opportunities." [11] Historically, the reasons for Puerto Ricans being denied this symbolic capital arise from two circumstances that combine to affect them uniquely among other Latina/o groups. On the one hand, since the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico's connection to the United States has been vaguely colonial while remaining unresolved. On the other hand, in the 1950s and 1960s rural migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland positioned Puerto Ricans as peripheral labor in the "lesser-skilled segments of the U.S. labor force," like the garment industry in the New York City metropolitan area.[12] In consequence, the insertion of Puerto Ricans in the economic and social fabric of New York City and the United States gave them a "structural position ... as part of a racialized, indeed colonial, pattern of labor exploitation." [13] According to Grosfoguel, Puerto Ricans in the mainland suffer a situation of "coloniality," that is, a "colonial situation" characterized by "the cultural, political, and economic oppression of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations."[14]

In practical terms, the peripheral position of Puerto Ricans as colonial subjects in the imagination as well as the reality of the mainland clearly translated into numbers. In 1972, just a few years before the appearance of White Tiger, unemployment among Puerto Ricans in the mainland – and this is especially relevant since Hector Ayala will be identified as unemployed throughout his initial cycle – was twice as much as among the general population. [15] Only 30% of

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Santiago-Valles, Kelvin A., and Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz, "Social Polarization and Colonized Labor: Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1945-2000," in *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 94.

[13] Ibid., 88.

[14] Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 146.

[15] Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, "Social Polarization," 96.

mainland Puerto Ricans twenty-five years or older had completed high school, as opposed to 63% of the general population.[16] According to a variety of measurements of social status, such as the already mentioned education accomplishments and unemployment, but also destitution and dependency on family programs, Puerto Ricans, at the time, were consistently classified as the lowest of all ethnic groups. They were also "[s]patially and socioeconomically compressed by racial segregation and limited affordable housing"[17] in areas such as South Bronx, Hector Ayala's milieu, which was described in the late 1970s as "the most extensively abandoned piece of urban geography in the United States."[18] City institutions, after the failure of previous initiatives and dealing with a serious fiscal crisis, cut most needed services in the early 1970s,[19] leaving South Bronx unprotected against unemployment, racial conflict, and crime, especially gang related.[20] The resulting scenario was an urban dystopia:

> People moved to the South Bronx out of necessity, not choice, often installed there by the welfare authorities. All who could move away did so. Those who couldn't often vented their rage on the police, the firemen, the buildings, and the neighborhood. Thus, shops closed, landlords abandoned buildings, the population declined, and the neighborhoods of the South Bronx collapsed.[21]

This dire situation was aggravated and normalized by "overwhelming Anglo media characterization of Puerto Ricans in particular (and, to a lesser extent, Latinos in general) within the United States [that continued] to be

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 97.

[18] Conway, William G, "'People Fire' in the Ghetto Ashes," *Saturday Review* 23 (July 1977): 16, quoted in Gonzalez, Evelyn Diaz, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 109, accessed June 20, 2014, Proquest Ebrary.

[19] Ibid., 127-128.

[20] Ibid., 118-120.

[21] Ibid., 121.

disproportionately peppered ... with vermin infestations (biological and social), crime-ridden neighborhoods and shady figures,"[22] a problem that not only permeates *Deadly Hands*, but that will accompany Hector Ayala into the less mature, color world of the regular Marvel Universe when he reappears in *Peter Parker* #9 and 10. In those two issues, centered at the superficial level on minorities, public education, and the fiscal crisis, Ayala is part of a large group of African-American and Latina/o disadvantaged youths protesting against the decision of the president of Empire State University to cut down Night School programs. The representation of this group constantly oscillates between a compassionate (yet paternalistic) depiction that resembles the relatively recent – at the time – civil rights protests and social activism, and the underlying threat that they pose as a mob of infantilized, brute others that challenge the decisions made by white men in power, a collective of others that might bring, at any moment, the violence of the barrio to the educational institution. The tension generated by this duality in representation creates an excess that the story will try to dominate, in order to re-establish order. At the end, though, a forced happy ending leaves too many questions open, and the solution to social strife is postponed for another day.

In the comic books that concern us, as in most of the abandoned or dystopian urban spaces ubiquitous in popular culture from the mid-1970s onwards, South Bronx is constructed as a space where there is little room for hope or for descriptions of how the economically, racially, and socially oppressed are trying to improve their lot. It will become clearly identified as an in-between space, somehow connected to hegemonic space, but only as a fantastic place where social disease, crime, and otherness can be enclosed and controlled. In this regard, White Tiger's South Bronx becomes paradigmatic of the "racially coded 'combat zones,' which populated the middle-class, Euro-North American imaginary"

[22] Ibid., 114.

since the 1970s.[23] In this regard, two stories are worth noting – "...Death is a game called Handball!" and "Flesh of my Flesh!" – published in *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #27 and 29, respectively. For a change, White Tiger will not engage in random, pointless battles with masked characters, but instead will explore the social space of the South Bronx. In these stories, the barrio is constructed exclusively as a location of violence and abuse, and the community is articulated as criminal gangs or brainless mobs intent on lynching White Tiger for a murder that he did not commit. Once again, the (actual and symbolic) violence in these comic books is displayed as a symptom of an internal flaw of these barrios (as the space of a racialized other), rather than as an indicator of larger social inequalities. From this perspective, there can be no mention of grassroots efforts to overcome the abandonment to which South Bronx and other barrios were subjected, since these efforts would problematize the hegemonic construction of Puerto Ricans and their barrios as racial and diseased others who need to be supervised, disciplined and controlled. As Beverly Tatum remarks, "[s]ometimes the assumptions we make about others come not from what we have been told or what we have seen on television or in books, but rather from what we have *not* been told."[24] In this regard, an important role in the circulation of popular culture stereotypes about Puerto Ricans and South Bronx is played by the active disregard towards models of cultural, organized practices (involving labor, neighborhood and youth organizations) that, especially in New York City and Chicago, attempted to revitalize Puerto Rican barrios and offer basic services that institutions should have been providing.[25] Acknowledging these grassroots initiatives would

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[23] Ibid., 110.

[24] Tatum, Beverly Daniel, "Defining Racism: 'Can We Talk?'" in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., eds. Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumenfeld, Carmelita Rosie Castañeda, Heather W. Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, and Ximena Zúñiga (New York: Routledge, 2010), 66.

[25] Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, "Social Polarization," 97-99.

entail, for the dominant group, disavowal of the colonial relations between the United States and Puerto Rican subjects, recognition of the latter's agency, and a neutralization of the stereotypes that hegemonic media produce and circulate.

Quite the reverse, the barrio will be, for White Tiger, as well as for his Latina/o successors, a space of violence, crime, and poverty, of social disintegration. When discussing specifically the role of violence in the construction of the barrio, the bibliography on African-American superheroes becomes once again helpful. On the one hand, as Grosfoguel pointed out, African-American and Puerto Rican in New York City during the 1970s suffered stereotypes constructed along the same racializing, hierarchical lines.[26] Similarly, as mentioned above, the first explosion of African-American superheroes came right before the birth of White Tiger, and both owe a lot to "Blaxploitation" in terms of aesthetics. One of the main points that differentiate African-American superheroes from their white counterparts is that black superheroes are constantly fighting the system, and oftentimes are presented as occupying a liminal space between law and crime, in the same manner as "Blaxploitation" anti-heroes did.[27] They fight in areas that are invisible to white superheroes, while the latter engage in defending the social order, but not in ending social oppression. At the same time, as Lendrum points out, black heroes engage in violent behavior to stop mostly black criminals that are trying to prey on their communities. They do not attack institutionalized racism or the structural inequality that allows those criminals to emerge in these unregulated spaces in the first place: "What is worse is that [the simplistic distinction between good and evil that black heroes end up reproducing] oversimplifies a dynamic and complicated urban landscape that has developed

[26] Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 149-150.
[27] Lendrum, "Super Black," 368-369.

due to hundreds of years of colonial history including slavery and economic barriers."[28]

In the case of the White Tiger's barrio, the displacement of the violence of social injustice to random, generic violence is present throughout his initial cycle. Hector Ayala's adventures do not take him out of the barrio (until *Peter Parker* #9), and, as it will eventually be revealed, he is connected, through his brother Filippo, to all the crime that he fights against. Neither Ayala nor his White Tiger alter ego challenge the roots of the problems that plague the neighborhood, nor do they criticize the precarious position that Puerto Ricans, starting with Ayala's own parents, occupy in the mainland. Instead of addressing the institutional and cultural roots of oppression, instead of even facing super-villains, Ayala will spend most of his time fighting his brother, his barrio, or himself. Thus, a non-critical approach to the representation of location will be part of the stereotyping mechanisms that regulate the portrayal of White Tiger, and Puerto Ricans, as the racialized, colonial other within these comics. Yet the manner in which these stories engage in the reproduction of stereotypes affects them and their characters at a deeper level as well.

Stereotypes and Representation

Charles Ramirez Berg begins his critique of how Hollywood – taken as a representative of the entertainment industry and mainstream media – has dealt with Latinas/os by stating the difficulty of finding a common definition of what stereotypes consist of and what they do. He appropriates from cognitive psychology the idea of stereotyping as a "value-neutral psychological mechanism that creates categories and enables people to manage the swirl of data presented to them from their environment." [29] The mental process that initially

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[28] Ibid., 370.

[29] Ramirez Berg, Charles, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, & Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 14.

identifies differences in order to categorize the world around us, however, quickly becomes value-ridden, and stereotyping combines with ethnocentrism in order to assign negative qualities to others, to an "outgroup" that, from within the in-group – that is, "one's own group [as] the center of everything" – cannot be but perceived as "incomplete and imperfect."[30] According to Tatum, stereotyping happens when a lack of direct experience with and direct knowledge of other groups is substituted by second hand (mis)information that we receive from an environment that includes our immediate community, institutions, and the media. When prejudice, understood as "a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information,"[31] is added to the equation, stereotypes of minority (out)groups – produced and reproduced by hegemonic media – become part of an intricate, racialized social structure that distributes advantages and burdens in an unequal manner.

In the United States, the media and pop culture representations of minority groups, such as Puerto Ricans, are especially prone to reproducing certain prejudices based upon false information or lack of knowledge. When the stereotype is encountered in a comic book, the predominantly white reader will accept and internalize the stereotype, or the stereotype will confirm the previous knowledge (prejudice) that the reader might have of Puerto Ricans, unless he or she has direct knowledge of, or experience with, Puerto Rican communities and individuals. When analyzing the main (archetypal) Latina/o stereotypes in Hollywood, Ramirez Berg defines stereotypes as a "negative mirror of dominant values" that, in the case of Hollywood and Latinas/os, "identif[ies], justif[ies], and support[s] mainstream (Anglo) beliefs [about the Latino as other:]…ideological stereotyping [becomes]

[30] Ibid.
[31] Tatum, "Defining Racism," 67.

hegemony, the subtle, naturalizing way [in which] the ruling class maintains its dominance over subordinate groups."[32]

Right from the beginning of Hector's Ayala journey in *Deadly Hands* #19, a series of visual and linguistic elements are deployed to confirm hegemonic stereotypes. Even before we see the character, we can "hear" his otherness through his first words in broken Spanish: "¿Que [*sic*] es?" In the next panel, physical features (hair, moustache) and quickly ascribed nationality (see "Puerto Rico me encanta" t-shirt in figure 1) provide the shorthand that allows the reader to identify the newly introduced character as a Puerto Rican youth.

Figure 1. In case there were any doubts, Hector Ayala performs his Puerto Rican identity. (*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #19 (December 1975), 65. ©Marvel).

[32] Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images*, 22.

Besides loitering in dark alleys by himself, the reader will soon realize that Hector only has a clear social role within his family, as useless son and brother in need. While family is a staple of Latina/o cultures, the problem in Hector's case is that, except for his brief stint in college (as part of the supporting cast for Spider-man in *Peter Parker*), his social circle is limited to his immediate family, and most of the plotlines he engages in arise from family conflicts. The Ayala family does not work as an inner, Spanish-speaking, sheltering community against the outer, public, English-speaking one. Instead, family and home generate a claustrophobic space that adds to his problematic position as a superhero.

At the same time, though, the Ayala household presents a symptomatic study of stereotypes of Puerto Ricans. Hector's mother and father represent hard-working, Spanish-speaking, humble Puerto Ricans, who gave their lives to unskilled labor so that they could bring the family to the mainland. In this sense, they represent a "good" Puerto Rican family who, except for Filippo – Hector's oddly-Italian-named black sheep brother –, know what their place is and dutifully perform the role given to them by the social, political, and economic structure. In fact, this is the role that Awilda, Hector's strong young sister who dominates him, will advocate for when she tries to get him to quit his superhero career: "Puerto Ricans are supposed to be **janitors**, Hector! **Cab drivers! Delivery boys!** No RISKS! No PROBLEMS! They stay ALIVE!"[33]

For paradigmatic or archetypical comic book characters such as Spider-man or Superman, families, especially parents or parental figures, play important roles, since they transmit a strong moral code that humanizes the superhero (and guarantees his allegiance to the social order). Spider-man and Superman have powers and abilities that

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[33] [Mantlo, Bill (w), Keith Giffen (p), and The Tribe (i),] "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright...," *The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #24 (May 1976), [Marvel Comics], 55 (emphasis in original).

exceed reality and realistic expectations, but the moral issues that they face, and the moral solutions that they learned from their families, allow (mostly white, Anglo) readers to identify with them to a certain extent. In the case of Hector Ayala, on the contrary, his family and his inability to act independently from them are elements that contribute to his otherization. The most obvious lesson he derives from them is that the power that he has come across by sheer luck is an obstacle to fulfilling the passive, submissive role in society that coloniality has assigned to him due to the low symbolic capital of his ethnic group. It will come as no surprise, then, that, at the end of the *Deadly Hands* cycle, in the story dramatically entitled "Dark Waters of Death!," evil brother Filippo will be revealed as the criminal "mastermind" that has been behind several of the unexplained events happening around White Tiger. The punishment for Filippo's transgressive appropriation of power will be death, but, ironically, it will come in the form of suicide, as he learns that the mastermind that planned his criminal endeavors was not his own, but rather Fu Manchu's. [34] Fu Manchu, who appears *Deus ex machina*, constitutes an unavoidable reference when talking about the creation of "others" in Western popular culture, and he has more resonance as a representation of cunning and evil than Filippo Ayala. In the world of White Tiger, even when trying to resort to crime to acquire any kind of power, the Ayalas, and by extension Puerto Ricans, end up unwittingly serving other people's designs.

Inextricably linked to family and barrio, Spanish is commonly used as a marker of Latina/o characters. In Karen

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[34] Dr. Fu Manchu is a fictional evil Chinese mastermind created by British author Sax Rohmer and first appearing in *Story-teller* in 1912. He then went on to star in a series of novels, films, and radio serials, becoming a popular culture icon. ("Fu Manchu, Dr." *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (January 21, 1995): N. PAG., *Literary Reference Center*, accessed March 13, 2016, EBSCO*host*). Today, he can be seen as a clear symptom of sinophobia and the "yellow peril" fear that swept Great Britain in the early decades of the 20th Century.

McGrath's analysis of representation of race and gender in regards to Araña – a new Latina character created for the Marvel Comics universe in the early 2000s –, the latter's use of Spanish is symptomatically identified, together with the role her family plays in her life, as elements that express her "Latina identity." [35] Mainstream comic book creators, especially non-Latinas/os, are not necessarily expected to understand the complex map of identities that constitute the Latina/o experience, and the varied intersections of race, gender, nation, and language that said map represents. However, it becomes highly problematic to see this diversity of experiences and social identities reduced, for the purpose of entertainment, to pure otherness via dialogues punctuated by an "amigo" here and there.

Not unsurprisingly, White Tiger becomes a pioneer for future Latina/o superheroes when it comes to his use of Spanish, too. Mantlo borrows from film, television, and cartoons the stereotyped depiction of the English spoken by fully or partially bilingual Latinas/os as a heavily accented English generously sprinkled with Spanish words. Mantlo's Ayala, with his colorful patois will, in fact, be the first in a long line of Latino super-heroes that will compulsively call everyone they talk to "amigo," "compadre," "señor," and "hombre," in a similar manner to how African-American characters scripted by white writers will unfailingly resort to slang. Spanish, even if meaningless, and slang, even if made up, serve in each case the function of racializing the other. White characters' colloquial English, on the other hand, becomes normalized as the universal, clear vehicle of rational communication.

Besides Hector's compulsive need to address everyone using the same words over and over, Mantlo's use of Spanish in the dialogues for the White Tiger cycle presents an

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[35] McGrath, Karen, "Gender, Race, and Latina Identity: An Examination of Marvel Comics' *Amazing Fantasy* and Araña," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 15:4 (2007), 280.

additional problem. The Spanish spoken by Ayala, his family and anonymous characters in the background is marked by certain linguistic peculiarities. If read by a native or heritage Spanish speaker, Ayala's lines might probably provoke a chuckle rather than recognition, familiarity, and identification. Instead of Puerto Rican or Nuyorican Spanish or Spanglish, the characters tend to speak in a rather direct, and often erroneous, translation of English structures into Spanish. For instance, when White Tiger is about to be attacked by someone from the back, he thinks to himself: "¡El peligro viene dos!" [36] which, while probably attempting to say something along the lines of "Danger Strikes Twice!," literally means "Danger comes two!" A few issues later, as he is trying to wake up a super-powered character who is setting a hospital on fire while unconscious, White Tiger exclaims: "¡El corpus de Cristo!" – an expression that did not exist in Spanish before Hector – and "¡Carajo! ¡Yo incendio! I burn!"[37] The problem here would be that "yo incendio" means "I set [something, we do not know what in this case] on fire," not "I burn," as would be intended in this sequence. There are plenty more instances of this bad translation, but these few samples illustrate the point. The attempt to use Spanish to create dialogues that more or less accurately reflect the speech of Puerto Ricans in New York City would be undermined by the lack of skills, resources, or care to make those lines actually sound like genuine spoken Spanish or Spanglish.

At the same time, though, it should be noted that when Spanish is used to convey information essential to understand the logic and importance of a certain action, the same character that uttered those words in Spanish will provide the reader with an immediate English translation, as well as with additional information/expressions of emotion. Leaving aside genre conventions and necessities, Puerto Rican

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[36] [Mantlo, Bill (w), George Perez (p), and Jack Abel (i),] "The Beginning," *The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #20 (January 1976), [Marvel Comics], 56.
[37] Mantlo, Giffen, and the Tribe, "Tiger, Tiger," 52.

characters are being constructed as having a doubly problematic relationship with Spanish: they do not speak Puerto Rican Spanish or Nuyorican Spanglish properly, and the use of Spanish is immediately neutralized when the information is repeated in English.

Fig. 2. Usted no comprende que you don't understand. (*Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-man* #10 (September 1977), 1. ©Marvel).

This problematic relationship with Spanish acquires its darkest, yet most unintendedly hilarious, point at certain moments in *Deadly Hands* and *Peter Parker*, when Hector Ayala/White Tiger is running around, mulling over interior monologues which he duly translates into English within his thought balloons or when talking aloud to himself, with no non-Spanish speaking witness (except for, decisively, the reader).

Fig. 3. ¿Qué me está pesando [*sic*], Madre de Dios? (*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #20 (January 1976), 59. ©Marvel)

Fig. 4. Only yourself, Hector, only yourself. *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-man* #9 (August 1977), 7. ©Marvel)

Bilingualism, code-switching, different roles and spaces for each language, and diverse proficiencies in languages are all part of the Latina/o experience. The inner self-translating appearing in these comics, however, is slightly different, and it supports the racializing of Puerto Ricans as colonialized subjects, who replicate within their own minds the language of the metropolis. To a degree, this instant, internal self-translation indicates a narrative desire to read Puerto Ricans, and by extension other Latinas/os, as alienated from their own language, or the language of their country of origin, to

the point that they have interiorized the colonial power's demand that they make themselves be understood in English. Additionally, Hector Ayala – and the Latina/o superheroes that come after him – would seem to lack an inner, intimate self, and, instead, even their internal thought process is a performance of their inner, unsolvable inconsistency for the benefit of the English-speaking audience. Hector Ayala's self-translation and his Spanish, poorly translated from English, should be read, thus, as markers of how he internalizes his position as a colonial other.

Another element that contributes to this characterization is Hector's passivity – hence, the appropriateness of his "loitering" the first time we encounter him. He operates almost as an empty category that will be defined by overblown – mostly internal – dramatic dialogue and by misinterpretation by other characters. Cultural constructions of Puerto Ricans that contribute to maintain and justify the low symbolic capital assigned to them by hegemonic groups often entail also a feminization process. "Racially subordinate populations" are given negative traits associated to women: "being capricious, irrational, excessively emotional, wayward, infantile, and therefore in need of guidance, control, protection, supervision, instruction, and tutelage." [38] Ayala is often characterized as a feminized, irrational other: unable to act, he indulges in self-pity and excessive reaction. His tendency to collapse into emotional breakdowns and the general lack of direction that he displays have to be repeatedly reined in by "mature" male figures, such as Detective Blackbyrd, Spider-man, and Daredevil. At the same time, in a doubling up of the feminizing effect, he will need the guidance and control given to him by similarly racialized, female characters such as his sister Awilda, and his African-American girlfriend, Holly Gillis. Furthermore, Hector is also constantly misread by others, yet the meaning that they assign to him becomes a very important component

[38] Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz, "Social Polarization," 88.

of how he is intended to be "read," since he tends to contradict himself and lacks stability as a character. At different points of his adventures in *Deadly Hands,* for instance, he is declared by other characters to be a drug-addict, an adult baby, a junkie, a killer (repeatedly), unstable, a criminal, a thief, a lazy unemployment check collector, someone with street cred, etc. These classifications connect clearly with, on the one hand, stereotypes that contribute to otherize minorities, but, also, with hegemonic stereotypes of Puerto Ricans circulating at the same time as these comic books, such as "[t]he association of 'Puerto Rican' and 'African American' identity in the Euro-American imaginary with racist stereotypes such as laziness, criminality, stupidity, and uncivilized behavior."[39] The character of Hector Ayala works, both in excess and in lack, as a recipient of racist stereotypes linked to Puerto Ricans and African-Americans in New York City, and, unavoidably, with the practical consequences of those stereotypes. While it is true that mainstream superhero comic books have traditionally abused stereotypes as means of characterization, what makes Ayala's case stand out is the relentless way in which they are applied to him, the fact that these labels are consistently applied due to his milieu (South Bronx) and his ethnicity (Puerto Rican), and his inconsistency as a character beyond the way in which others impose meaning on him. Thus, another problem emerges from the implicit, and at times, explicit, narrative desire to make Ayala/White Tiger a positive representation of minorities, in spite of all these problems. For instance, going back to Hector's first appearance, and how he obtains his superpowers, we can already detect how efforts to construct him as a hero are being undermined by the stereotypes that the authors are reproducing. The Sons of the Tiger, previous possessors of the Tiger amulets that confer Ayala superpowers, had to prove themselves worthy of those powers via their martial arts prowess. Ayala the Loiterer, on

[39] Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 149-150.

the other hand, just happens to stumble upon them in a darkly-lit alley where the Sons of the Tiger had thrown them away when breaking up as a group.

Moreover, from the moment he picks up the amulets until the end of his tenure at *Deadly Hands*, Hector does not choose freely what to do. Instead, he is pushed along by circumstances, allies and enemies. In this initial cycle, Ayala and the White Tiger engage in non-stop action, trying to obtain revenge for some obscure, unmentioned reason or to clear his name from crimes falsely attributed to him/them. From the beginning of his career as a Latino superhero, Ayala is marked as superheroic other, too: he finds by sheer chance, and among other heroes' trash, the tools that will grant him a chance to do something for himself, and supposedly, for his "people." However, these tools have already been rejected by non-Latino characters, and the story will demonstrate how unsuited Ayala and his context are to the power that the amulets represent. Thus, the potential superhero fantasy takes an unpredictable turn, and it becomes a reflection of the problematic identity and colonial situation of the Puerto Rican diaspora: Ayala is caught between worlds, languages, genres, and communities. All in all, he can only survive by following what other characters tell him to do, which restores his placement as a colonial, feminized, racialized other, and reaffirms hegemonic views on Puerto Ricans.

If You Read Peter Parker Backwards...

The role of stereotype in the construction of Hector Ayala/White Tiger is especially poignant if we compare the pair to Peter Parker/Spider-man. Spider-man, first appearing in *Amazing Fantasy #15* (August 1962), was, at the time of the creation of White Tiger, a flagship character of Marvel Comics, as well as one of the most recognizable creations of American popular culture worldwide. Inside comic book history, he had also become the most successful embodiment of the "hero-by-accident" trope in American superhero narrative. It is against Peter Parker/Spider-man, then, that we

have to position Ayala/White Tiger, in order to appreciate the meaningful differences between the constructions of Parker, representative of the centrality and universality of Whiteness in American society, and Ayala, who, quite literally, becomes a "dark" mirror image of Parker.

Peter Parker, created just about thirteen years before than Ayala, had become Spider-man – and, thus, the main character of his own superhero narrative – after being bitten, at a science museum, by a spider that had been exposed to radioactivity. Parker, a Queens' native, is a teenager high school student that comes across his super powers and superheroic identity as a consequence of his pursuit of scientific knowledge. Hector Ayala, on the other hand, accidentally finds the amulets that grant him his White Tiger powers, as well as his identity problems. Yet, instead of the educational setting where Parker acquires his powers, Ayala finds the amulets in a dark alley. Peter Parker is aligned to hegemonic society and its educational institutions (high school, museum, science). However, Ayala's origin cannot help becoming an inverted quote of Parker's story. From the moment of his birth as a comic book character and a superhero, he is already marked negatively as other. Instead of the power, light, knowledge, and technology to which Peter Parker is linked since he acquires his powers, Ayala first appears as a loiterer, linked to the margins, to the dark alley. The reader will never find out what he was doing in that deserted *cul-de-sac* alley[40] and, in fact, for the longest time Ayala enjoys no occupation or social space assigned to him, except for his family. He is introduced as a marginal character that moves between interstitial spaces (alleys, roofs of apartment buildings, South Bronx) and passively comes across the power of the amulets, generating a profound instability in his legitimacy as a superhero.

Peter Parker poses his basic moral dilemma and resolution in a single story, in a single phrase "With great

[40] See figure 1.

power comes great responsibility," thus rearranging in an orderly fashion all the destabilizing elements of his narrative: technological accident, departure from reality, exploitation of new-found ability to earn money through wrestling and the possibility of emancipation, loss of father figure, and acknowledgment of responsibility. The basic problem that the character embodies justifies, after the fact, the accident that created him. On the other hand, Ayala lacks a clear moral dilemma that his further adventures will develop or attempt to solve, nor will he be able to enjoy a sense of closure or resolution. In fact, his whole tenure in *Deadly Hands* is characterized by rambling and chaotic action, and a deeply troubling relationship with a super-powered alter ego of which, initially, he is not even aware. While Peter Parker's dual identity offers him the possibility of freedom, power, and enjoyment, Hector Ayala's initial transformations into White Tiger are surrounded by imagery that resembles withdrawal symptoms associated with drug addiction (figures 5, 6 and 7), a connection highlighted by Ayala getting always sick as he returns to his non-superhero self, and even underscored by a passerby (figure 5).

Fig. 5. Hector Ayala and the symptoms of being a superhero.
(*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #20 (January 1976), 59. ©Marvel)

Fig. 6. Sick again. (*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #21 (February 1976), 62. ©Marvel)

Fig. 7. "Meet Hector Ayala, sick at the moment..." (*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #22 (March 1976), 45. ©Marvel)

The moral dilemma that, unwittingly, White Tiger's adventures come to pose, but not resolve, seems to be centered around duality. Whereas dual identity represents a flight of fantasy for Peter Parker, for Ayala, the Puerto Rican colonial subject, duality is impossible to reconcile and produces excess in the form of a schizophrenic relation to his alter-ego. Hence, the recurrence of drug-addiction and junkie imagery.

This aspect of the Hector Ayala/White Tiger conundrum opens the possibility to talk about over-symbolization of minority representation in hegemonic media and popular culture. This over-symbolization would imply narrative inconsistencies and tensions that emerge due to the representative value that a narrative tries to assign to a minority character that would be fated to stand in for his perceived group, while white characters are allowed to enjoy their individual lives. One of the clearest instances in which this over-symbolization threatens with overtaking the

narrative is, precisely, the junkie imagery surrounding Ayala's transformations. Interestingly enough, the parallelism between withdrawal and superheroic transformation are carefully drawn out in the first few issues, later to be dropped altogether. Nevertheless, although abandoned, these initial instances remain obscure, non-symbolizable residues that open the narrative to ambiguity, avoid closure, and connect to harsh realities external to comic books. Another aspect of this overflow of symbolic meaning is present in the plots, which are continuously contradicting themselves (a story is taking place within 24 hours of the previous one, yet some characters seem to have lived days in-between those 24 hours). It is difficult to avoid reading these peculiarities as other than indexes of Ayala's conflicted relationship with his dual identity and his inability to behave (or to be read) as a mainstream superhero.

Unlike Peter Parker's case, Ayala's original stumbling upon the amulets is not redeemed by a simplistic restoration of order. On the contrary, Ayala becomes the other that has illegitimately occupied a position that is not his, that of the white, Anglo superhero – and his all white uniform is especially meaningful in this regard. He is dressed in/as white, but spouts words of Spanish to reaffirm his identification as other by the reader. In this case, the comic is quite effective at neutralizing any possible ambiguity.

Fig. 8. Just in case any casual readers happened to pick up *Deadly Hands* #30 without any prior knowledge of the White Tiger, and assumed him to be a "white" character, he screams in Spanish (and self-translates, to be sure). (*Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #30 (November 1976), 11. ©Marvel)

Consequently, the stories centered around him will continuously problematize identity (in regards to Hector's fragile self, as well as in regards to the oversymbolization of minority representation), and deny him closure as well as agency. The instability that he brings to narrative as a character will only be controlled when, at the end of *Deadly Hands* #32, his initial cycle is abruptly finished. Ironically, he returns as a character in the full color *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-man* #9, the first of an already mentioned two-parter starring Spider-man and White Tiger that focused on minorities, higher education, cuts in public services, and protests. In the cover, a tagline describes the White Tiger, puzzlingly, as "Marvel's Most Controversial Creation!" which he very well might be, although probably not in the sense that the comic's editor or writer had in mind.

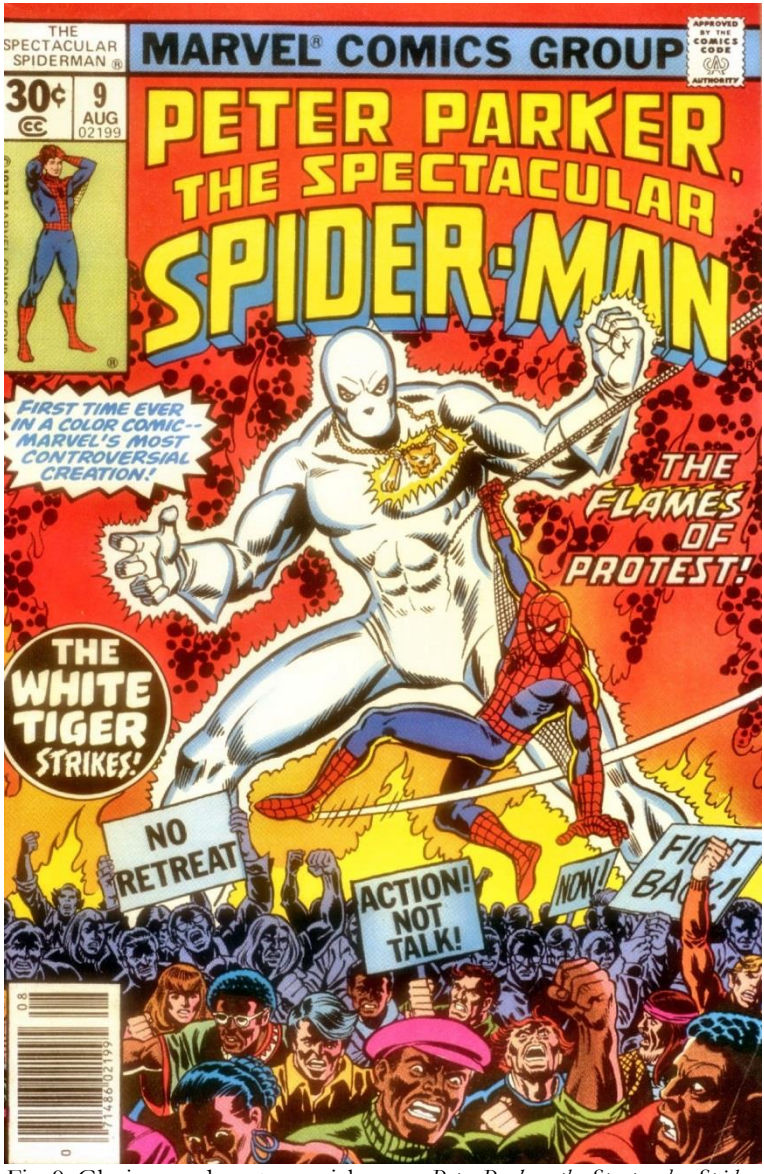

Fig. 9. Glorious and controversial cover. *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-man* #9 (August 1977). ©Marvel

It is necessary to highlight that in his transition from the world of black and white magazines to the color of standard

comic books, White Tiger will forget a lot of the problems of identity that he had presented in *Deadly Hands*, and, in fact, he will effortlessly be cheered by the people in the barrio. As if by magic, his representativeness, as both a character and a superhero, will no longer be in question, and this might be the basis for future Latina/o superheroes to fondly remember and respect him for reasons that the long-time reader will be unaware of.

Fig. 10. And, suddenly, as if by magic, White Tiger finally becomes... ¡el héroe del barrio! *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-man* #10, 22 (September 1977). ©Marvel

Fig. 11. The sun begins to rise over the Bronx, and over Hector Ayala. *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-man* #10, 27 (September 1977). ©Marvel

This change in tone, with Bill Mantlo still at the helm narrating his adventures, might be explained by the change in audience, and the necessity to submit to the Comics Code Authority, which might have frowned at the depictions of

drug addiction-like symptoms as well as to some of the violence present in earlier stories. While *Peter Parker* had to be approved by The Comics Code, *Deadly Hands* did not. At the same time, though, this newer, less conflicted White Tiger will no longer attempt to occupy a central position in the narrative. Quite the contrary, he becomes part of a multiracial cast of characters that surround Peter Parker in college. In a sense, it is only when he loses any pretense to centrality or agency that he ceases to function as a narrative problem. Only when he becomes a sort of unofficial Spider-man sidekick, accepting his secondary, inferior role, will he be able to actually be fully integrated in the Marvel Universe as something other than a chaotic cypher.

Your Legacy is tu legado, amigo!

As we move simultaneously towards the end of this paper as well as towards that of Hector Ayala's spotty career fighting himself and crime, the idea of legacy needs to be further discussed. There are two characters that have carried on the White Tiger mantle after Hector Ayala was killed in *Daredevil v2 #40* (February 2003), and both of them are, remarkably, female blood relations of Hector's. First came Ángela del Toro, supposedly the daughter of Awilda Ayala. Ángela enjoyed a brief career as White Tiger in the first decade of the 21st century. After she was killed off (yet another pattern emerging here), Ava Ayala, allegedly Hector's youngest sister, became the new White Tiger in the Marvel Comics universe, as well as in the *Ultimate Spider-man* animated TV series. While it would be necessary to analyze the way in which these characters, as Latinas, double up the amount of otherness they represent and whether they have to suffer, in the 21st century, the same humiliations that Hector endured, the remaining of the paper will focus on how the idea of White Tiger's legacy is presented via Ava Ayala, both within the Marvel Universe, as well as in a meta-comical way in regards to the position of Latinas/os in mainstream superhero narratives.

When Ava is introduced as part of a slate of young superheroes joining the "Avengers Academy," the idea of legacy is immediately introduced through her confrontation and dialogue with Reptil, another young Latino superhero. First, Ava mentions the fact that she is following on her brother's footsteps: "It's a family legacy. One I'll never stop working to honor."[41] However, after analyzing the way in which stereotypes structure Hector Ayala, and his problematic relationship to the idea of community, it is difficult to understand the next mention of his legacy:

Fig. 12. An intense legacy of intensity. (*Avengers Academy* #21 (January 2012), 17. ©Marvel)

While it is true that Hector Ayala opened the doors for Latina/o superheroes and superheroines like Reptil or Ava Ayala, this scene can also be read as the beginning of a whitewashing of Hector's problematic existence as a fictional character. Instead of the confused, split, incoherent way in

[41] [Gage, Christos (w), Sean Chen (p), and Scott Hanna (i),] "Welcome, Students," *Avengers Academy* #21 (January 2012), [Marvel Comics], 16.

which he originally was portrayed, Hector is presented from this moment on as a model for Latina/o superheroes. He might very well be so, but only if we forget his initial misadventures, and we stick to his appearances as a secondary character. As we have seen, the Hector Ayala that sacrificed everything, was active in the community, and became a role model for Latina/o characters did not actually exist in the comic books that tell his story. Rather, he might have existed in the silence of the untold stories, in the void that lies between his last appearance in *Peter Parker* #52 (March 1981), and his brief return in *Daredevil* v2 #38 (December 2002) only to die in a gratuitous way in #40 (February 2003) after being wrongly accused of a crime he did not commit. Yet this might be too generous a reading of the retconning of Hector Ayala's symbolic value, since his disappearance as a character for two decades was due to lack of interest in him as a character on the part of comic book creators and readers alike. Although in the interim other Latina/o characters emerged, both inside and outside the mainstream,[42] Hector Ayala was killed off as a character not worthy of a second chance, something remarkable when considering how the two major American comic book publishers rely heavily on formulaic iterations and the rehashing of old characters and plots.

When Ava Ayala starts her own fictional career in *Avengers Academy*, the scenes in which she is alone with Reptil are marked by a tension around the figure of Hector Ayala and the idea of legacy. This tension shall be used to (re)establish him as a role model, and to create the idea that he was a great brother to Ava and a defender of his community.

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[42] Aldama, *Your Brain*, 29-60.

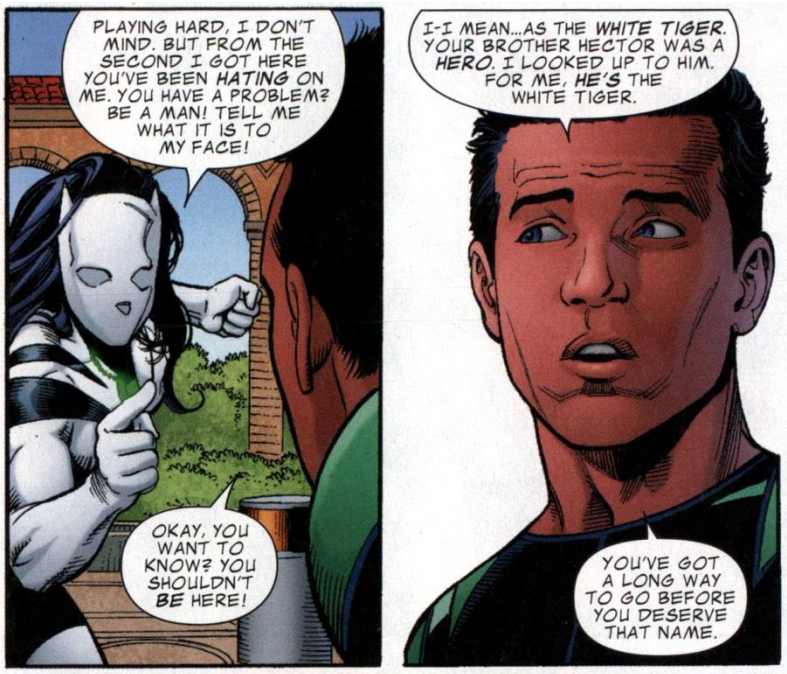

Fig. 13. History being rewritten. Everybody looked up to Hector, but not while he was alive. (*Avengers Academy* #22 (January 2012), 4. ©Marvel)

Not unlike how certain tropes become obsessive in Hector Ayala's initial forays into masked adventure (family, barrio, badly-translated Spanish, images of sickness and addiction), his reintroduction as the imagined originator of a legacy (both particular, for his sister, but also universal, for Latinas/os like Reptil) is also plagued by an obsession with re-inscribing him as an honorable, inspirational figure. Like everything else surrounding Hector Ayala, this excess emerges from his incapacity to claim that kind of status for himself in his own stories. In fact, insistence on the two principal emotions that he awakens in the young characters (love in his sister, respect in Reptil) only draws attention to the continuity problems that allow for these new emotions to surround the memory of tragic Hector Ayala.

"Retcon," used as a verb or noun, is a common term within the world of popular culture fandom. It alludes to the idea of "retroactive continuity," and refers to "process of revising a fictional serial narrative, altering details that have previously been established in the narrative so that it can be continued in a new direction or so that potential contradictions in previous events can be reconciled."[43] In the comic book universes of the two major companies, retcons are a very common occurrence, especially if we take into account that some of their characters have been around for more than 75 (DC Comics) and 50 (Marvel Comics) years, respectively. Their "continuities," or established histories, get constantly revisited according to plot needs, current commercial interests, and the desire to maintain a sense of continuity over "large and complex narrative constructs that tend to get out of hand."[44]

In the case of Hector Ayala and his legacy, *Avengers Academy* gives us a double retcon. We have already established that his White Tiger was not allowed, as a character, to reach the foundational status that current, younger characters assign to him. At the same time, though, the second revision of his continuity is more problematic, especially since it concerns the very existence of Ava Ayala, the sister that is trying to assert his role as the founder of a heroic tradition. Before *Avengers Academy* #21, it had been clearly established that Hector only had one brother (Filippo) and one sister (Awilda), who both die within a relatively short period of time during Hector's stint as White Tiger. In regards to Ángela del Toro, his alleged niece, at no point in Hector's stories is there a mention of any children of Awilda's, something that would be difficult to hide given that most of Hector's social life has to do with his close family, Awilda included.

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[43] Booker, M. Keith, "Retcon," in *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels,* vol. 2, ed. Keith M. Booker (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2010), 510.
[44] Ibid.

The case of Ava is more mystifying yet. When readers are introduced to the Ayalas, the parents are shown as middle-aged, and there is absolutely no mention of a fourth sibling: Awilda is presented as his only sister, and it is clearly implied that Filippo and Hector are the remaining members of the family. When, in *Peter Parker* #49, Hector's parents and Awilda get killed in a random display of senseless violence by a character called Gideon Mace, neither a younger sister (Ava) nor Awilda's daughter (Ángela) are mentioned. Both of them would have become orphaned minors at that point. After a series of adventures in which Hector almost dies at the hands of Mace, he decides to leave New York on a bus with his girlfriend. In the farewell dialogue between Peter Parker and Hector Ayala, there is no talk about a younger sister and the responsibility her existence would entail for Hector, his only close relative. On the contrary, it is implied that he has nothing or no one left to keep him in the city. This makes Ava's scenes in *Avengers Academy* more puzzling, since they make her brother, whose stories ignored her existence, such an integral part of her life.

Fig. 14. He really loved her, even though he did not seem aware of her existence. (*Avengers Academy* #24 (March 2012), 9. ©Marvel)

It is, then, as if the contradictions and inconsistencies that affected Hector cannot be simply retconned out of Marvel continuity by the *Avengers Academy* writer, Christos Gage. Quite the opposite, any attempt to erase them poses further problems, and more so since this specific attempt takes place in *Avengers Academy*, a series that purports to represent diversity of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. When Reptil mentions to Ava that he has a collection of old magazine articles that talk about Hector,[45] Gage and his characters presuppose that Hector Ayala's fictional biography is a blank slate that can be constantly rewritten in order to satisfy the demand for diversity and minority characters for a growing demographics/market. In the case of the White Tiger, though, if one considers his centrality as the first Latino superhero, this rewriting of his history is especially egregious, since it cannot help but bring back to mind coloniality, and how the colonial subject's history does not exist, but on the contrary, can be written and rewritten to satisfy the demands of hegemonic power.

What is missing in contemporary Marvel's rewriting of Hector Ayala's memory and legacy is, precisely, an acknowledgment of the way in which he was originally a stereotyped attempt at commodification of the experience of a marginalized population. Without this acknowledgment, the shadow of the racialized otherness that constrained the original White Tiger will continue haunting its successors, and, by infection of excess, Latina/o superheroes and superheroines published by the major companies.

Trying to erase his history generates a paradoxical text that uncannily echoes the duality that Marc Singer observed in African-American superheroes in mainstream comic books. Applying ideas from Ralph Ellison, Frederick Wertham and Franz Fanon to stereotypes of racial and ethnic minorities in superhero comic books, Singer points out how "[w]hether

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[45] [Gage, Christos (w), Tom Grummett (p), and Cory Hamscher (i),] "Family," *Avengers Academy* #24 (March 2012), [Marvel Comics], 9.

these stereotypes assume the form of unrealistic portrayals of racial minorities or an equally unrealistic invisibility, they often fulfill this double function of oppression [of the minority] and reaffirmation [of white American's believe in equality]."[46] This duality, in the case of Hector Ayala, appears as the tension between a present that tries to re-imagine, from today's awareness, how the first Latino superhero should have been, and the evidence of the historic creation and development of the White Tiger, and how they connected to stereotypes of Puerto Ricans circulating at the time. Today's celebration of diversity, though, cannot take place without properly acknowledging the excesses of the past, unless we want to leave the door open to their return.

All in all, the original White Tiger should be revisited as a foundational moment to understand the different ways in which the first Latino superhero created by mostly non-Latino authors historically reproduced and naturalized a series of racializing stereotypes and prejudices towards Puerto Ricans. In a way, Rob Lendrum's conclusion can be applied to White Tiger as well: "The black heroes of the 1970s do succeed at creating a new space in superhero masculinity for race. Unfortunately, that space is the marginalized area of stereotype." [47] Indeed, Hector Ayala created a legacy. However, this legacy is as contradictory and problematic as his own existence as a fictional character, and only by acknowledging this history will we be able to unburden his imaginary descendants.

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[46] Singer, "Black Skins," 107.
[47] Lendrum, "Super Black," 371.