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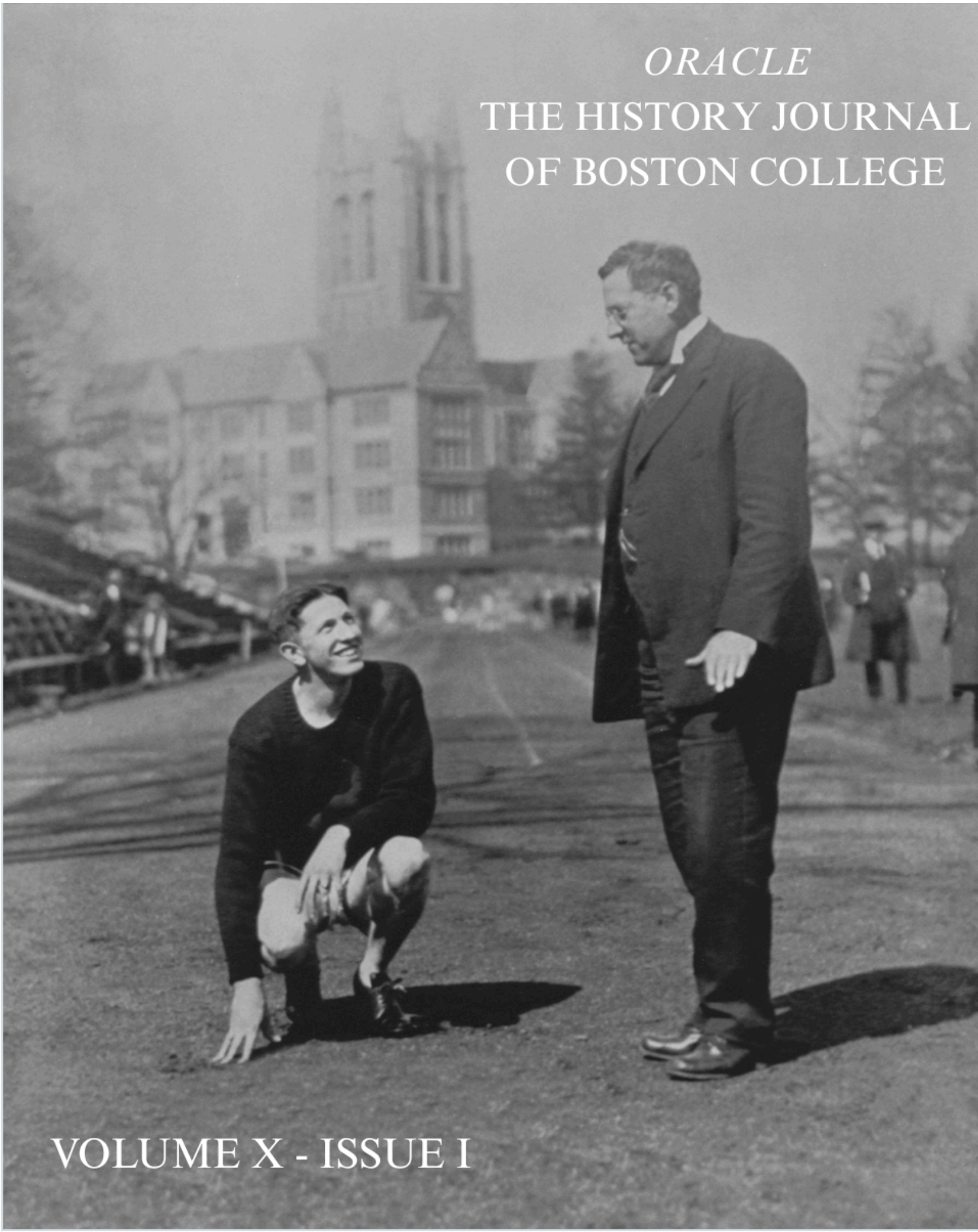

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Ireland's Legacy of Shame: The Magdalene Laundries

Lillian Armstrong

Ireland's Legacy of Shame: The Magdalene Laundries

Mary Magdalene, the biblical prostitute granted spiritual regeneration for repentance, serves as the namesake for the Magdalene Laundries. The Laundries, founded in London in 1766, were a product of the eighteenth-century Protestant "Rescue Movement" that served to aid and save prostitutes. The aim of the Laundries was to house and treat "fallen women" and ensure their purity. Over the 230 years of their existence, over 10,000 women and girls of all ages were sent to the Laundries in a variety of ways for many different reasons, all with the intention of controlling their sexuality. Women in the Laundries faced constant silence, grueling work, harsh punishment, and often life sentences. They spent much of their time in prayer, and were rewarded with spiritual markers for working toward eternal salvation.

The Laundries' long history has been well hidden. Only in the past roughly thirty years since their closing has public knowledge of their tainted history emerged, and survivors and their families are calling for apologies and redress. The Magdalene Laundries fostered a unique relationship between Church and State in a country where the government and religious authorities long colluded to frame female sexuality as a source of shame that needed to be controlled and punished in order to create ideal Irish citizens. Focused on the spiritual salvation of women, the Laundries failed to treat women with care or enable them to achieve this objective forced upon them.

Lady Arabella Denny established the first Magdalene Laundry in Ireland in 1767 at 8 Leeson Street, Dublin. As with other early Laundries, Denny's objective was to house women or girls perceived to be in need of moral support. While initially focused on prostitutes, the definition of the "fallen woman" expanded in the nineteenth century to include alcoholics, the homeless, and others. Some women also voluntarily entered a Magdalene Laundry as a means of

survival. The Laundries' mission was to "protect, reform," and "rehabilitate,"[1] yet they became places of internment and exploitative labor under Catholic religious orders. Lay people or committees founded the first Laundries in Ireland; by 1850, they were all operated by Catholic female religious. Four religious orders ran the Magdalene Laundries: the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge. With ten Laundries located throughout Ireland, the official figure, from the State-produced McAleese report on the Laundries, estimates that just over 10,000 women were imprisoned in the Laundries over the course of their existence, though this is likely a significant underestimate.[2] The Church intended the Magdalene Laundries to function in the same way that prisons did for men. Rather than focusing on women's role as national citizens and solely making women better overall for the State, the Laundries focused on the penitent's moral and spiritual citizenship. According to Dr. Louise Branagan, a sociologist of punishment at the University of Strathclyde, "If prisons aim to reform people so they may return to society, better citizens, Magdalene Laundries alienated women from their lives and this world, to secure their citizenship in heaven."[3]

This focus on spiritual citizenship became particularly important with the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Following centuries of Protestant British colonial oppression, during which the Catholic Church served as one of the leading proponents for independence, Catholicism and Irish nationalism became inextricably linked. During the formation of the Irish Free State, the government increasingly shared their duties with the Catholic Church, giving the

[1] Jennifer Yeager and Jonathan Culleton, "Gendered Violence and Cultural Forgetting: The Case of the Irish Magdalenes." *Radical History Review*, no. 126 (October 1, 2016): 136.
[2] "About the Magdalene Laundries," Justice for Magdalenes Research, last modified June 13, 2017, http://jfmresearch.com/home/preserving-magdalene-history/about-the-magdalene-laundries/.
[3] Louise Brangan, "States of Denial: Magdalene Laundries in Twentieth-Century Ireland," *Punishment & Society* (January 9, 2024): 13.

Church more power. As Ireland cemented its identity as Catholic, the newly founded State hoped to derive its strength from the purity of the citizen body. The goal was for all citizens to remain morally pure to attain eternal salvation. Spiritual citizenship became State citizenship. Yet, the "government simply did not have the capacity to manage, let alone foster" this purity and "morality on a national scale."[4] Catholic institutions and religious orders were able to fill this void and help citizens work towards a higher moral purpose.

For Catholics in Ireland, to sin was not just a sin against God, but against the nation as well. Any sins, especially those of a sexual nature, violated the purity of the nation. All Irish citizens could achieve purity through self-denial of sexuality, engaging in chastity and abstinence. In the post-independence era, "Ireland contained what it perceived as sexual immorality by locking it away."[5] The control of sexuality was essential to the Catholic Church. Men were perceived to be able to be chaste and control their sexuality on their own. Women, on the other hand, were sent to and locked away in Magdalene Laundries as a way for the State to control sexuality through the Church.

While women were sent to the Laundries for a variety of reasons, controlling their sexuality and making them morally pure to fit the ideal Irish citizen was the most important. Girls and women were sent by a range of people, depending on motivation and justification. Some of the reasons for sending women to a Laundry included having illegitimate children, reporting being sexually abused, and aging out of the Industrial School system. Industrial schools housed "poor and working-class children considered 'neglected' or 'wayward.'"[6] The Church feared girls aging out of Industrial Schools would become too sexual, and the Laundries were a

[4] Brangan, "States of Denial," 6.
[5] Yeager and Culleton, "Gendered Violence," 135.
[6] Mark Coen, Katherine O'Donnell, and Maeve O'Rourke, *A Dublin Magdalene Laundry: Donnybrook and Church-State Power in Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 1.

way to prevent them from becoming sexual at all. There were also "'mental defectives,' infanticide cases, those on remand from courts,"[7] and women feared to be in danger of being too sexual. Committals into Laundries as punishment for infanticide or other crimes were common as judges reduced sentences for women and sent them to Laundries, and then on probation. Women who were believed to have been too sexual to ever achieve morality were considered hopeless cases. The Laundries could prevent women from being sexual or keep women who had become too sexual, in the eyes of the Church, away from others.

Different reasons for being sent entailed varying ways of committal into a Laundry. Women were often sent by the State through court orders, typically for smaller, petty crimes. Many nuns transferred girls who had spent their childhoods in orphanages or Industrial Schools to Laundries. This transfer was easy for the nuns as some shared convent campuses, or were in close proximity. Young women aged out of Industrial Schools at age sixteen, but many were transferred on license to a Laundry prior to sixteen. Girls were put on post-discharge supervision from Industrial Schools for two to four years, which could be easily supplied by nuns in a Laundry.[8] Some girls from working-class backgrounds were sent by their families, typically at the recommendation of a priest. Unable to afford a secondary school education for their daughters, families believed that Laundries were a form of training school.[9] Family members also sent young women after the women reported being a victim of rape, incest, or sexual assault.[10] When girls' virginity was taken and they were no longer sexually pure, being sent to a

[7] Yeager and Culleton, "Gendered Violence," 135.
[8] Martin McAleese, "Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries" (Gov.ie, Ireland, 2013): XVII.
[9] Peggy, "Peggy," interview with Jennifer Yeager, *The Waterford Memories Project*, audio, 49:39, https://www.waterfordmemories.com/oralhistories.
[10] James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 31.

Laundry was used as punishment for telling the truth. Women were told this not just by their families, but the nuns as well. The nuns told the women that it was their fault.

Nuns' humiliating and degrading treatment of the penitents was an important feature of the women's time in the Laundries. Upon arrival at a Laundry, women had their heads shaved and their clothes taken, replaced by an often ill-fitting grey and black uniform. Additionally, women received a religious pseudonym. Women's new names had a spiritual significance**,** "in that the assigned name invariably was that of a Catholic saint who henceforth would act as a 'special patron' guiding the woman in her quest for spiritual redemption."[11] With the aim of guiding women to sexual purity and eternal salvation, a new name was fitting in shedding their former selves, in particular their sexual indiscretion and impurity.

The nuns strictly enforced a rule of silence. The women were never allowed to speak unless given permission or for prayer. Survivors recalled that "the only noise that would perforate the quiet was the relentless churning of the machines and the thrum of prayers."[12] Nuns could give women a worse job as punishment for speaking.[13] Penitents were unable to talk to other women within the Laundries and received no visitors. The only outsider the women had contact with was the man who came to pick up and drop off the laundry.[14] Occasionally, the nuns took the women on short, supervised walks. The walks emulated processions of humiliation and were described by one survivor as having one nun in front and one behind, so that she felt like a cow being herded.[15]

Women's work commenced early in the morning. Some Laundries began the day with mass, while others began work straight after breakfast. Work occurred six days of the week, with

[11] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 37.
[12] Brangan, "States of Denial," 9.
[13] Peggy, interview.
[14] Peggy, interview.
[15] Peggy, interview.

Sunday as a day of rest, though women did not truly have a day off and were obligated to spend the whole day in prayer. The women labored without pay "washing, ironing or packing laundry, and sewing, embroidering or doing other manual labour."[16] The laundry the women washed came from a wide variety of people and places, from members of the public and local businesses to State institutions such as hospitals, the defence forces, and parliament, all the way up to Áras an Uachtaráin (the President's Residence).[17] The women also performed "general chores relating to the running of the institution."[18] The work was constant, monotonous, and mandatory. The nuns drew on the metaphor of the laundry to enforce ideals of women's spiritual and moral uncleanliness and the need to be clean and pure in the eyes of God. "The employment of women in laundry activities assumed symbolic significance in that the cleansing of society's dirty linen paralleled the individual cleansing of the moral stain on their souls."[19]

Much of the work women did also allowed for bodily degradation at the hands of the nuns. Penitents were left standing or kneeling for grueling hours while laboring.[20] As recounted by Ellen Murphy, interviewed for the Magdalene Oral History Project, nuns made her stay in wet clothes all day after she fell into a washing machine.[21] Nuns also forced women to strip and bathe in front of them.[22]

Punishments for refusing work or acting out were common, as disobedience was believed to be an act against God, though many women were unsure why the nuns were punishing them.

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[16] "About the Magdalene Laundries."
[17] "About the Magdalene Laundries."
[18] Claire McGettrick, Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke, James M. Smith, and Mari Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 19.
[19] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 38.
[20] "About the Magdalene Laundries."
[21] Ellen Murphy, "Oral History of Ellen Murphy," Interview by Sinéad Pembroke, Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Oral and Archival History, Government of Ireland Collaborative Research Project, Irish Research Council, April 9, 2013, 1.
[22] Nora Lynch, "Oral History of Nora Lynch," Interview by Sinéad Pembroke, Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Oral and Archival History, Government of Ireland Collaborative Research Project, Irish Research Council, July 24, 2013, 17.

In an interview with the Justice for Magdalenes organization, survivor Mary Jefferies exclaimed, "What would they punish us for? We didn't know what they punished us for…."[23] Women in the Laundries faced physical beatings and psychological abuse at the hands of the nuns.

In addition to being punished through bodily degradation, women in the Laundries experienced social isolation and food deprivation.[24] Their daily schedule consisted of three main components: labor, silence, and prayer.[25] The rule of silence began as soon as the women were awakened. The food was quite simple and menus were often repeated weekly.[26] Breakfast was bread or porridge and tea. Lunch and dinner were typically stews or soups and bread again. In some Laundries, nuns served treats on holidays or special occasions.[27] The emphasis on simple foods, a simple life, and frequent prayer mimicked the life of the nuns running the Laundries. Nonetheless, the penitents' lives differed greatly from those of the nuns. The nuns regularly ate more nutritious foods and did not engage in the physical labor that the women did. Nuns' role was solely supervisory.

Despite the horrific conditions which women were subjected to, it was fairly uncommon for them to run away. Already receiving harsh punishments and knowing they would receive worse from the nuns if they were caught, women were cautious of trying to escape. Women who did manage to run away were "'hunted, and often captured and returned by the police,'"[28] the Gardaí. Those who were caught attempting to escape were often transferred to a new Laundry.

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[23] Mary Jefferies, "Oral History of Mary Jefferies," Interview by Sinéad Pembroke, Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Oral and Archival History. Government of Ireland Collaborative Research Project, Irish Research Council, September 12, 2013, 1-52.
[24] Alice Mulhearn Williams. "'The Whole Thing was Numbingly Bland and it was Deliberately So': Food and Power in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, 1922–1996," *Gender & History* 34, no. 3 (October 2022): 653.
[25] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 37.
[26] Williams, "'The Whole Thing," 656.
[27] Williams, "'The Whole Thing," 656/7.
[28] McGettrick, O'Donnell, O'Rourke, Smith, and Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*, 21.

Despite the rule of silence, women managed to create bonds with others, whispering when they could,[29] and transfer to a new Laundry was not optimal.

The nuns classified women on a hierarchical reward system. Women began as ordinary penitents and could advance to be a Child of Mary, and then a Consecrated Magdalene or Auxiliary. These levels symbolized their "journey towards spiritual salvation," with the ultimate goal of achieving sexual purity in order to fit the model of the perfect Irish citizen.[30] A penitent could be awarded "for being compliant, a docile worker" and "not resisting the rules."[31] These reward levels enforced the nuns' ideals of cleanliness, purity, and spiritual grace. Becoming a Child of Mary did not have much weight behind it; it was simply a title. The Consecrated Magdalenes took a vow to remain in the Laundry for life; they were promised a burial plot on the convent grounds, enforcing living a life of spiritual grace through death. The Consecrated were also given more power within the Laundries as Auxiliaries. They gave orders, reported other women's transgressions of the rules to the nuns, and were occasionally authorized to enforce punishments. It was likely only women sent to a Laundry under certain conditions who could achieve these higher statuses.[32] For example, women perceived to be hopeless cases, too sexual to ever reach spiritual purity, would not be permitted to become Auxiliaries. Those deemed "first offenders" had more chance of spiritual reclamation and could be used as a good influence over others when given the title of Consecrated Magdalene.[33]

In the 1960s, other Catholic-operated institutions, such as Industrial Schools and reformatories, began to come under scrutiny and close their doors.[34] While Laundries had not

[29] Peggy, interview.
[30] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 39.
[31] McGettrick, O'Donnell, O'Rourke, Smith, and Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*, 20.
[32] McGettrick, O'Donnell, O'Rourke, Smith, and Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*, 20.
[33] Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 48.
[34] Lucy Simpson-Kilbane, "'A document of truth?' Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the McAleese Report," in *Legacies of the Magdalen Laundries*, ed. Miriam Haughton, Mary McAuliffe, and Emilie Pine (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 53.

(yet) faced this critical spotlight, they began to close in the 1960s. Occupancy levels significantly decreased in most Laundries during the second half of the twentieth century. The first Laundry to close in 1963 was St. Patrick's Refuge.[35] One other Laundry closed in the 1960s. Many more closed in the late 1970s and 1980s. The 1970s was a period of change in Ireland, with the beginning of the Troubles in the late 1960s and an important constitutional amendment in 1972, establishing a separation of Church and State.[36] With this separation, religious orders relinquished some of their care to the government. The Sean McDermott Street Laundry was the last to close in October 1996,[37] likely the result of the High Park Convent exhumation.

In 1993, St Mary's graveyard at the High Park Convent and Laundry in Drumcondra, Dublin was exhumed. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge were in need of money after stock market losses. In hopes of selling the land to a developer, the sisters sent requests to the Department of the Environment to exhume the bodies.[38] They were asked to produce death certificates for everyone in the cemetery, but were unable to do so for approximately half of the women buried. In the eyes of a Catholic nation, little attention was paid to religious institutions as they could do no wrong. It is an offense not to report a death in Ireland,[39] yet it is something many Magdalene Laundries got away with. The exhumation produced 155 bodies, the largest exhumation in Ireland's history. Many of the bodies were unidentified at the time and remain so. In their book, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice*, McGettrick et al. write, "These discarded bodies and disturbed human remains constitute 'indelible' evidence of the wrongs committed against them in life."[40]

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[35] McAleese, "Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee," 21.
[36] "Referendum (Amendment) Act, 1972," Electronic Irish Statute Book, November 11, 1972, https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1972/act/23/enacted/en/print.html.
[37] "About the Magdalene Laundries."
[38] Kate Gleeson, "A Woman's Work Is… Unfinished Business: Justice for the Disappeared Magdalen Women of Modern Ireland," *Feminist Legal Studies* 25, no. 3 (November 2017): 300.
[39] Gleeson, "A Woman's Work Is…," 300.
[40] McGettrick, O'Donnell, O'Rourke, Smith, and Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries*, 164.

Many investigations occurred into the wrongdoings of the Catholic Church in Ireland and abroad in the early 2000s. The McAleese Committee was founded as a fact-finding task force to investigate State involvement in the Magdalene Laundries post-Irish independence. The Committee published the McAleese Report in 2013. Focusing on the role that government departments and State agencies played in the Laundries, the report found that the Laundries had "received direct financial assistance from the state."[41] The report further found that about a quarter of the known referrals to Laundries were conducted or aided by State agencies. With clear evidence of State involvement within the Laundries, there is significant public support for an apology from both the Church and State, as well as compensation for the women of the Laundries.[42]

After years of indefinite incarceration, forced labor, and physical and psychological abuse, all many women can hope for is an apology. In the wake of the McAleese Report, Taoiseach (Ireland's prime minister) Enda Kenny issued a "Statement on Magdalene Report." In the February 19, 2013 speech, Kenny declared that "[he], as Taoiseach, on behalf of the State, the government and our citizens deeply regret and apologise unreservedly to all those women for the hurt that was done to them, and for any stigma they suffered, as a result of the time they spent in a Magdalene Laundry."[43] The McAleese report and this speech serve as the State's admission of guilt for their involvement in the Laundries. Since the publication of the McAleese Report, the State has set up a fund and issued over €32 million in compensation to around 800 claimants.[44] These 800 claimants pale in comparison to the over 10,000 women and their families who have suffered from the trauma caused by the Laundries.

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[41] Simpson-Kilbane, "'A document of truth?'," 56.
[42] Carol Ryan, "Seeking Redress for a Mother's Life in a Workhouse." *The New York Times*, February 7, 2013.
[43] Enda Kenny, "Statement on the Magdalene Laundries Report" (speech, Dáil Éireann, Dublin, Ireland, February 19, 2013).
[44] Eirik Vatnøy and Dawn Wheatley, "Mediated Recognition in Campaigns for Justice: The Case of the Magdalene Laundry Survivors," *Communications* 47, no. 4 (July 15, 2022): 550.

The Catholic Church has yet to take any steps to acknowledge their wrongdoings or to issue an apology. Mary Merritt, a former Magdalene woman, interviewed by the *Daily Mail*, explained that all she wants before she dies is an apology from the Church.[45] The four religious orders have done everything they can to distance themselves from the stories of abuse emerging about the Laundries they ran. The nuns have repeatedly denied historians and other scholars access to their archives. In the words of Yeager and Culleton, "the lack of access to the archives points to the role of the Irish State and religious orders as gatekeepers of information and key participants in gendered violence toward survivors."[46] The closed archives make many wonder what more the Sisters could be hiding about the Laundries' history.

There is still much to uncover about the legacy of the Magdalene Laundries. The Laundries occupied a unique position in Ireland due to the relationship between Church and State. The Church and State's complicity in shrouding female sexuality as shameful allowed the Magdalene Laundries to gain a powerful place in Irish society. Nuns' mission within the Laundries was to promote the ideal female Irish citizen, a morally pure woman who denied her sexuality in order to achieve spiritual salvation. While women attended mass and prayed daily, their entire identities were stripped away and they were infrequently, if ever, treated with any sort of care or love that could have aided their spiritual citizenship in personal and meaningful ways. The Magdalene Laundries are still widely recognized as stories rather than an official part of Irish history. Religious orders opening their archives and more in-depth research would enable the Magdalene Laundries to assume their proper place in Irish history. The women confined to the Laundries deserve to have their history truthfully told.

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[45] Sue Lloyd-Roberts, "'I Want an Apology Before I Die': The 'Wayward' Women Abused by Nuns in Ireland's Notorious Magdalene Laundries Who Are Still Demanding Justice More than Two Decades after the Last One Closed," *Daily Mail Online*, September 27, 2014.
[46] Yeager and Culleton, "Gendered Violence and Cultural Forgetting," 134/5.

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Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College

Volume X | Issue I Article II

From Campus to Capitol: How Student Revolutionaries Resisted Colonial Rule in Shanghai

Thang Ly

Introduction

The Paris of the East, the New York of the West

As the night grows on, the sky buckles underneath the city's brilliant neon lights; the hum, the tune of the lavish jazz clubs fill the air with decadence and vice. The surge of endless bodies, from natives and expats alike, rush in and out of colorful street markets and cabarets—stuffed along the streets and scattered throughout the city. Clinking glasses, puffs of cigarettes, and roaring laughter. Everyone has a place in the opulent noise.

But in the midst of this beautiful distraction lies a dark secret. By filtering out the dazzling lights and grandeur, a city overrun by crime, political uprising, and foreign infiltration is revealed. This cosmopolitan dream is meticulously carved up into pieces by the hands of outsiders; like a shattered mirror, the mending of these fragments would fail to reveal the city's original identity. Its overindulgence in sin temporarily pacifies a harsh and heavy reality for many, but a spotlight remains on the land of new-founded opportunities.

An American expat arrives for the first time, remarking the "tall buildings, the well-paved streets, the large hotels and clubs, the parks and bridges, the stream of automobiles, the trams and buses, [and] the numerous foreign shops…"[47] The era of modernity seems to have finally caught up in the East as everything glitters within sight. Its blend of ancient traditions with Western ideals propels the significance of this Chinese trading port and swings open the door to Asia. This would be the city the West claims as its own; the Paris of the East, the New York of the West—The Party at the End of the World. Welcome to Shanghai from the 1840s to the 1940s, its most prosperous yet turbulent century.

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[47] Hawks, Pott F L. *A short history of shanghai: Being an account of the growth and development of the International Settlement*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2009.

Thesis

For nearly a century after the 1840s, the coastal city of Shanghai was used as a foreign experiment to see how a city might look, react, and grow with both Eastern and Western political, social, and economic ideas. It was an experiment conducted by Western powers that tested the potential hybridity of the two regions, an urban fantasy in which the East would successfully meet and join with the West. However, it was quickly met with resistance and opposition in response to its failed attempt at colonization through deliberate segregation and economic exploitation. Everybody took part in fighting for the heart of Shanghai and China at large, whether it was students, academics, laborers, politicians, or foreigners. Rampant factionalism became the new norm as each group had their own visions and tactics for obtaining the city. Nevertheless, most had a common goal: to get rid of foreigners. The current literature surrounding Shanghai's decolonization undervalues the resistance efforts made by student revolutionaries, while focusing too heavily on the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and Chinese communists as the definitive point and actor. By centering Chinese students and their three central movements after the end of the Second Opium War (1860), a fuller picture of their influence on Shanghai's decolonization can be extensively understood.

This essay will be split into 5 major sections. The first section will examine the history of the two Opium Wars between Britain and China and how it heavily fueled political rivalry and objections to foreign influence in Shanghai. Afterwards, the second section will further advance the definition of Shanghai as a colonial city and the surrounding literature that supports this argument. The third section will contain primary anti-colonial movements spearheaded by students in opposition of Shanghai and the broader colonial rule in China. Finally, the last two

parts of the essay will end with the relevancy of student revolutions and final thoughts, respectively.

A Brief Recap of the First and Second Opium War

The First Opium War: A Fallen China

Before the rise of Western merchants in mainland China during the late 19th century, China's economy was thoroughly self-sufficient. Opportunities for foreign trade were held entirely at one seaport in Canton, now modern-day Guangzhou in the Guangdong province. One frequent merchant, whose fascination with Chinese goods, such as porcelain, silk, and tea, caused them to make detrimental trade decisions, was Britain. The skewed situation in which Chinese merchants did not want to buy any British goods forced the British to strike an unfavorable commerce deal to satisfy their desires. However, this was only possible through the leveraging of silver, their most precious resource. An imbalance was created between the two nations and it became clear that Britain was on the losing side. To tip the scale in their favor, Britain implemented a solution that was pervasive yet simple: infiltrate the Chinese black market by injecting substantial amounts of illegal opium to destroy the state from the inside out. Britain's beloved poppy plant harvested from their Indian colonies was a triple threat in holding the potential to reap massive profits, secure their authority over China, and propagate their power in the East.

It took approximately 30 years after implementation for Chinese authorities to finally address the opium crisis directly. Out of all the side effects of addiction, losing millions of people in the workforce was arguably the biggest threat to the Chinese economy and society.[48] The Chinese health industry was not equipped with effective rehabilitation treatments to get people

[48] Lu, Lin, Yuxia Fang, and Xi Wang. "Drug Abuse in China: Past, Present and Future - Cellular and Molecular Neurobiology." SpringerLink, November 8, 2007. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10571-007-9225-2#citeas.

out of the opium dens, putting China on the brink of societal collapse. As a result, Lin Zexu was chosen by Emperor Daoguang to supervise the illegal opium trafficking and stifle its supply and use in 1839.[49] Zexu did not stall to see his people rot before his eyes. He jump started his anti-opium campaign in which he designed several intense measures to combat the issue directly. The death penalty for all opium possessors, the periodic shutting down of Canton to confiscate the city's opium, and the public destruction of opium at the beach were all put into effect within the same year that he started.[50] This internal battle within China soon became a war on drugs.

In the "Letter of Advice" that he wrote to Queen Victoria, Zexu frankly reasoned, "the fact [was] that the wicked barbarians beguile the Chinese people into a death trap. How then can we grant life only to these barbarians? He who takes the life of even one person still has to atone for it with his own life," implying that British merchants should be punished for demolishing the native population under Chinese law, even if it meant the death penalty. Such a notion was neatly called "getting rid of a harmful thing on behalf of mankind."[51] He pleaded for the permanent end of trade and for her to "check [her] wicked and sift [her] wicked people before they come to China…"[52] Though the letter never reached its intended reader, it captivatingly revealed the desperate state of China's declining health in an abrasive manner. It was obvious to Zexu that the illegal trade was undermining his country, but he believed that it was still possible to salvage the relationship between one another. "How fortunate, how fortunate indeed," Zexu wrote, if the two countries could come together to enjoy the blessings of peace under the Celestial Dynasty.[53]

[49] Teng, Ssuyu, and John Fairbank. "Letter of Advice to Queen Victoria." Digital China/harvard: Letter of advice to Queen Victoria. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://cyber.harvard.edu/ChinaDragon/lin_xexu.html.
[50] Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. "The Opium Wars in China." Asia Pacific Curriculum. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china.
[51] Teng and Fairbank, "Letter of Advice to Queen Victoria."
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

Regrettably, what was to come would transform China's internal war on drugs into a war against Britain, famously known as the First Opium War.

Word circulated about China's treatment of British merchants and opium supply as they came back from their expedition. Tensions rose as friendly diplomacy failed and their backs were turned against all of Britain's demands for compensation. By September of 1839, Zexu passed a bill that forbade the sale of food to British merchants in an attempt to deter any further trade, prompting the British officials to issue an ultimatum: lift this ban or face retaliation.[54] Thinking that any naval battle would be in China's favor since the convenience of home territory gives them quick access to mainland resources, China stepped up to the challenge. Three years later, several naval skirmishes were fought in the Pearl River Delta in the South China Sea near Hong Kong with relatively equal wins and losses. Despite that, it was Britain's modern technology that outclassed Chinese war tactics and weaponry.

The last definitive battle was fought in 1841 when Britain's first iron warship, *The Nemesis,* an all-encompassing feat that apprehended the Industrial Revolution in deploying "iron, coal and steam in the service of mankind, particularly in the service of transportation and of [the British] empire."[55] It sailed to Canton and, in one fell swoop, captured the foreign trading post amidst fear and confusion that struck many on mainland China. In due course, the British would put ink to paper as they drafted their first treaty, the Treaty of Nanking, to end the First Opium War and rebalance their trade agreement and power in the East.

The Second Opium War: The Birth of Modern Shanghai

Shanghai as it is known today started with the Treaty of Nanjing, signed in August of 1842. The treaty drafted by the British forced the first five trading ports open, Shanghai included, along

[54] "Hong Kong and The Opium Wars." The National Archives, December 12, 2023. https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/hong-kong-and-the-opium-wars/.
[55] Marshall, Adrian G. *Nemesis: The first iron warship and her world*. Singapore: Ridge Books, 2017.

the East China Sea to mark the end of the First Opium War and officiate the era of Western encroachment on mainland China. One of the most notable clauses in Article II of the treaty allowed for "British subjects, with their families and establishments, [to be] allowed to reside, for the purpose of carrying on their Mercantile pursuits, without molestation or restraint at the Cities and Towns [of the ports]."[56] This devastating clause was taken advantage of and stretched beyond its limits to authorize foreign capitalists and settlers from other nations such as France, Russia, America, and Japan to trickle in and establish their geopolitical presence in the East as well.[57] Eventually, concessions were to be allotted to settlers and businesses, all governed by the extraterritorial laws of the residing nations. A city that was built by and for the Chinese population was now being taken away from them in favor of foreign bodies. In hopes of one day taking the city back, they clung onto every territory and shop they had and played by the rules of the foreigners. If they were to win, they must be persistent in establishing their presence everywhere, all while the foreigners separated themselves into concessions.

Concessions and settlements were invasive of city planning and living in that they were pieces of land granted by the Chinese government to foreigners to live and conduct business in exchange for rent payment.[58] Put differently, these areas were essentially miniature versions of the country that owned it with their independent administration and extraterritoriality laws that voided Chinese authority. The simple act of walking across territory lines resulted in abiding by a whole new set of rules and regulations. Any passerby would argue that it was extremely difficult

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[56] "Treaty of Nanjing (1842)." USC US-China Institute. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://china.usc.edu/treaty-nanjing-nanking-1842.

[57] Damstra, Jacob R.W. "The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing and The Unequal Treaties." Journal of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Excellence (University of Western Ontario). Accessed April 24, 2024. http://jurpress.squarespace.com/s/Sovereignty-and-Underdevelopment-in-China-The-1842-Treaty-of-Nanjing-and-the-Unequal-Treaties.pdf.

[58] Chapter 1: History of Shanghai." Minimum Cost Housing Group, April 6, 2011. https://www.mcgill.ca/mchg/student/lilong/chapter1#:~:text=The%20colonial%20situation%20of%20Shanghai,by%20the%20Communist%20in%201949.&text=According%20to%20the%20stipulation%2C%20land,land%20owner%20%2D%20the%20foreign%20subjects.

and confusing to navigate a city that had more than three sets of laws waiting for them, depending on which turn they take. The most well-known institutions were the International Settlement, consisting of the American and English concessions, the French concession, and the Japanese concession.[59] Once a city united as one, it was now divided into many.

Considering the disappointing results of the Treaty of Nanking, due to strained trade and diplomatic relations, it motivated Britain to once again wait for the opportune moment to exacerbate any given conflict with China to start the Second Opium War. That opportunity would present itself in October of 1856 when Chinese marines seized a British warship, the Arrow, in Canton and arrested 12 Chinese crew members under the suspicion of piracy.[60] What the Chinese officials did not know was that the ship was registered under British name, and its seizure was disrupting British commercial shipments. With no formal apologies issued by China, the British sent more naval fleets to Canto, accompanied by the French too.[61] The war ended quickly, and, again, another treaty was drafted to sharpen foreign power and influence in China. By 1859, the treaties of Tianjin were signed by two victors and, additionally, Russia and the United States, which granted a significant boost of rights and privileges. These included, but were not limited to, the opening of 10 more seaports, the ability for foreign consulates to be built in Beijing, the authorization of Christian missionaries to spread their teachings, and the official legalization of opium trade with the West.

China did not stand a chance against Britain and France. The state was adversely altered by the aftermath compared to its opponent. Zexu's confident assumption that China would have won

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[59] Xie, Bingjie. "Becoming A Shanghailander: A Foreign City on Chinese Soil." Trinity College Digital Repository, 2017. https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/trinitypapers/49/.
[60] Carter, James. "How Britain Used a Small Pirate Ship to Spark the Second Opium War." The China Project, October 12, 2020. https://thechinaproject.com/2020/10/07/how-britain-used-a-small-pirate-ship-to-spark-the-second-opium-war/.
[61] Office of The Historian. "The Opening to China Part II: The Second Opium War, the United States, and the Treaty of Tianjin, 1857–1859." U.S. Department of State. Accessed April 29, 2024. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/china-2.

the wars was devastatingly wrong, as these conflicts revealed that China was susceptible to outside influence, which would eventually crumble the prosperous Qing dynasty. Subsequently, the dynastic system in China would fall due to Western imperial ambitions and collective social change in the country itself. The most damaging effect would be the century of humiliation that commenced after the treaties of Tianjin were signed. China, as it stood after the Second Opium War, was held in the hands of Western powers, and, like its most prized city, Shanghai, it would live out the next century under constant pressures of being moments away from caving in on itself.

Defining Shanghai as a Colonial City

Colonialism Examined: George Steinmetz and Barbara Arneil

What made Shanghai's colonial status so unique was that it was not solely controlled by one state or empire. It was simultaneously bullied by multiple different stakeholders, all of which were organized and cooperated with one another to take advantage of Shanghai's sovereignty, land, and breadth of resources. Given the complicated nature of the city's colonial rule, it is reasonable to argue that one local definition of "colonialism" may not be enough to describe the full extent of its oppression. Thus, the examination of various definitions and dimensions of colonialism as conceived by George Steinmetz, Barbara Arneil, and Isabella Jackson will aid in understanding colonialism under the city's special circumstances.

According to Steinmetz, colonialism's definition changes based on the historical period in which it takes place. The two periods he references are the early modern era when Europe's endeavors were primarily in the Western hemisphere, particularly in the Americas before the 18th century, and the modern era when the colonial goal changed to target Africa and Asia after

the 18th century.[62] Relying on the Latin etymology of the word 'colony,' he argues that colonialism during the early modern era should be explored as *colere*, meaning "to inhabit, til, and cultivate."[63] Following its agrarian roots, colonization during the early modern era, as defined by Steinmetz, refers strictly "to migration followed by settlement and transformation of landscape."[64]

Arneil furthers this definition by adding that colonialism is not just about inhabiting and cultivating the land for survival needs, but it also has a transformative dimension to it. As previously mentioned by Steinmetz, colonialism centers around productivity, enlightenment, and capital industry. Colonizers who come to a new land and establish a territory as their colony enforce the belief that their technological and intellectual superiority renders the natives of the land as backwards.[65] It is this crucial caveat that Arneil maintains that the colonizer assumes that the natives need help in improving their "idle bodies and irrational minds/souls" by educating them on the "more 'improved' ways of being, knowing and/or worshiping."[66] This process of educating the natives will in turn improve the land and generate revenue for the colony and colonizers.

Going back to Steinmetz, his second definition of colonialism during the modern era reposes on Arneil's framework, asserting that colonialism is "the conquest of a foreign people followed by the creation of an organization controlled by members of the conquering polity and suited to rule over the conquered territory's indigenous population."[67] He divests the attention away from the productivity and importance of land in the previous definitions and centers on the

[62] Steinmetz, George. "The Sociology of Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonialism." Annual Review of Sociology, July 30, 2014. https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043131.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Arneil, Barbara. "Colonialism versus Imperialism." *Political Theory* 52, no. 1 (September 9, 2023): 146–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/00905917231193107.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Steinmetz, George. "The Sociology of Empires, Colonies, and Postcolonialism."

act of conquest and the institution of colonizers themselves onto new lands. Consistently throughout these definitions, Steinmetz wrote succinctly that "colonialism always involves the arrogation of sovereignty by a conquering power," whether it is for Arneil's point of cure for idleness/laziness or their shared perspective of land transformation.[68]

Colonialism Expanded: Isabella Jackson and the New Definition

In the case of Shanghai, Jackson would insist that this form of colonialism where multiple stakeholders have a grip over a city should be given a new name. She coined the term "transnational colonialism," one that invokes the previous definitions but broadens the number of actors involved in suppressing the natives. Transnational colonialism, as defined by Jackson, "captures the cooperation of individuals belonging to different nations and networks in this institution…" and "does not imply equal influence of different national groups, as British influence clearly dominated."[69] Arriving at a crossroads in which all three scholars have laid out their definitions of colonialism, it is evident that picking one over the other would be futile. Rather, by placing all three in conversation with one another and piecing together their definition, colonialism's new framework ought to be understood as "the conquest and inhabitance of a land in hopes to politically, culturally, and economically improve it and its people by and for the colonizers' institutions and personal gains," in the context of Shanghai during the 1840s to 1940s.

Student Revolutionaries Against Colonial Rule

Campus as Battlegrounds: The Rise of Chinese Student Revolutionaries

Some may contend that student revolutions are weak, naive, and ineffective in creating real-world change. After all, most have been safely distanced from the subjects of their textbooks

[68] Ibid.
[69] Jackson, Isabella. *Shaping Modern Shanghai Colonialism in China's Global City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

and sheltered on campus from the dangers of the outside world. Who is to say that they are ready to face the monsters and evils that they have encountered in their studies? When the perceived "safe" distance between them and their learned materials shortens and becomes their lived reality, it is their insurmountable hope, creative vision, and conviction for a better future that allows them to act. As history remembers it, student-led movements and protests, especially in Asia, are no strangers to the echoes of dramatic transformation led by their youth who have toppled military dictatorships, ushered in radical ideas conceived as "freedom" and "democracy," and reformed states from the ground up, etching themselves in the very textbooks that they once read.[70] In Shanghai, this legacy was continued as a response to the effects of the Opium Wars and further external conflicts. It was Chinese university students who pioneered anti-colonial revolts in Shanghai, proving themselves valuable to statecraft, time and time again.

May Fourth Movement: "Get Rid of Traitors Inside our Country!"

The story of how Chinese university students ascended to become highly influential political actors started with the May Fourth Movement, often regarded as one of the first major anti-imperial struggles in China. Taking place after World War I, the Allied Triple Entente led by the French, Russian, and British empires promised China that they would give back all of their land, such as the Shandong province, that was previously taken by Germany for repayment after the 140,000 Chinese laborers were sent to the battlefields.[71] But the Triple Entente did not end up completing their end of the bargain. Instead, they transferred the land to Japan. Chinese diplomatic failures during the Treaty of Versailles failed to fight for the land and this humiliating

[70] Weiss, Meredith, Edward Aspinall, and Mark Thompson. "Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness on JSTOR." JSTOR, 2012. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv18p.
[71] Chen, Lujun, Karl-Heinz Pohl, Di Deng, Jiaxin Meng, Lin Wang, and Sudeshna Sarkar. *East-West Dialogue*. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2023.

defeat sparked undeniable rage among students across all major cities such as Beijing, Tientsin, Nanking, Wuhan, and Shanghai.[72]

Students in Beijing reacted first, holding a march at Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1919, with over 3,000 students from over 13 colleges in the city. Their standoff with the police held firm right outside the infamous "Gate of Heavenly Peace."[73] The two-hour negotiations failed, and so they marched to the Cao Rulin's house, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and burnt it down. Though the demonstration led to 32 students being arrested, the wildfire caught on to neighboring cities. Nationalism, as it seems, is an inevitable response to colonialism.

By the morning of May 6, just two days after the Beijing students' vulgar response, students across Shanghai's 33 campuses formed special committees and planned their first mobilization for the very next day.[74] Their already strained relations with the International Settlements and concessions became worse as the city mirrored the very people who took the Shandong province away from them. The Citizens' Assembly, as it would be called, caught the attention of local newspapers, having described the event as a massive "student parade" that marched with banners of their school's name.[75] The number of student revolutionaries outnumbered that of the movement in Beijing by ten-fold, garnering 30,000 youths who marched outside the old Shanghai city borders and held short speeches describing their resentment towards foreign invasion and unfair treatment. This display of the rally around the flag effect during a national crisis illustrated the intentional bitterness that young Chinese students had against the outsiders that resided in their city and country. A century of humiliation was a

[72] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
[73] "A Brief History of the May Fourth Movement." [Centenary of the May Fourth Movement]: A Brief History, April 28, 2019. https://english.pku.edu.cn/news_events/news/focus/8388.html.
[74] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*
[75] Ibid.

century too long, and it needed to end. It was clear that decolonizing Shanghai and China at large would call for the removal of foreigners and the reignition of patriotism nationwide.

The center of gravity shifted away from Beijing as Shanghai became the loudest political hotspot. After May 6th, an important turning point became obvious; the demonstrations propagated the reputation and legitimacy of students in Chinese politics and more importantly, showed that they were genuinely serious. Revolutions, especially spearheaded by students, are the most potent form of change. It goes against everything that the "youth" are perceived to be—lazy, irresponsible, and selfish. Everyone by that point knew what happened with the betrayal of the Shandong province, and, because of their movements, Beijing officials dismissed three pro-Japanese officials within the government and rejected the Versailles Peace Treaty.[76] All of the hard work carried out by student groups on a local level influenced decisions on the international stage. Foreigners in Shanghai and those who were waiting to get a piece of China had no idea what was to come for them, and, as they slowly lost control of their territories, the students would march on and reclaim what was rightfully theirs for their country.

Constellational Coresistance: Students' Involvement in The May Thirtieth Labor Protest

Six years passed by and the trajectory of the constant push-and-pull between students and foreigners reached a new height. On May 30, 1925, an eruption occurred in which students demonstrated all of the tactics and new strategies they learned since the May Fourth Movement onto enemy territory: the International Settlements and concessions. Longstanding tactics, including rallies, parades, mass memorials, public lectures, and telegram complaints, were scaled up and became more calculated.[77] However, what truly set the May Thirtieth Movement apart

[76] Chen, Zhongping. "The May Fourth Movement and Provincial Warlords: A Reexamination." *Modern China* 37, no. 2 (December 28, 2010): 135–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700410391964.
[77] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*

was that the students built alliances with their communities, specifically with the laborers, to create more activism around the working class.

In the history of colonialism, the politicians, businessmen, warlords, shipowners, and other elites stand on the backs of laborers, who hold onto the tabletop position for dear life. When the laborers unlock their elbows and slip their arms from underneath, it is not them who loses, as they cannot sink into the ground any further. Rather, it is the elites and their empires who plummet and learn, alas, that it was never them who were the most valuable. Chinese student revolutionaries saw this salient complacency and highlighted it, arguing with all the right contentions until the colonizers could finally understand that their reign of terror needed to end.

This alliance started after a Japanese cotton mill strike was conducted on May 24, 1925, when Chinese cotton mill workers and Japanese owners got into a deadly conflict over unexplained company layoffs that resulted in the death of a worker, Ku Chen-hung.[78] University students saw the struggles with the Shanghai labor movement that needed a stronger platform, and thus collaborated with the working class to carry out both an economic and nationalist movement. They needed justification for their movement, therefore crowning Chen-hung as a martyr to do so. The organizers gathered over 5,000 people, consisting mainly of laborers, to Hold a massive memorial service in his honor.[79] Common themes resurfaced, such as this struggle being branded as a fight against unequal treaties and worker's treatment, and laborers called on the student groups to help them "rediscover the spirit of May Fourth."[80] It is interesting to note how fast the tides can change. All it took was one day to completely rearrange the most electric and exciting city of its time to a bleak and dismal funeral sprawl. Flower wreaths, photos

[78] Ku, Hung-Ting. "Urban Mass Movement: The May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai." *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (April 1979): 197–216. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x00008295.
[79] Chesneaux, Jean. *Le mouvement ouvrier Chinois de 1919 à 1927*. Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2013.
[80] Ibid.

of Chen-hung, somber music, and large gatherings consisting of eulogies and anti-imperial speeches painted the neon city black.[81] But mourning, thoughts, and prayers can only do so much before real change can occur. The International Settlement and concessions had to bear witness to the suffering that the city was receiving.

Chen Yuzong, a student from Tongji University, wrote in his memoir with great wonder at how student leaders were diligently planning out and mapping their demonstrations in the International Settlement and concessions, like "generals mapping out an invasion," with an unbreakable chain of commands that linked everyone involved.[82] May Thirtieth was fated to be even bigger than May Fourth. The sheer size of the demonstration called for student revolutionaries to group up other activists into various-sized brigades or teams so that they would not flood the streets all at once or overwhelm the train station. When they arrived, on the morning of May 30, 1925, the first 3,000 students and workers penetrated into the International settlement territory. Scattered leaflets, waving banners, and deafening chants rang throughout the streets, calling for new Chinese labor laws.[83] The energy continued until the first signs of danger revealed themselves when more and more brigades filled the streets shouting "kill the foreigners," an empty threat that struck too close to the police and foreign elites.[84] When the police came and failed to disband the movement with batons, they took aim and fired their guns. 11 students were killed and the brigades would clear to process the trauma they had just witnessed.[85] The following months became one of the darkest periods of Shanghai's history as Chinese-owned businesses and laborers never fully recovered from the shock and were paralyzed

[81] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*
[82] Ibid.
[83] Smith, Stephen Anthony. *Like cattle and horses: Nationalism and labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927*. Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press, 2002.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Hoogland, Edward. "The May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai and the Limits of Sentiment." ScholarSpace, May 1, 2016. https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/items/d1f970ef-348a-4561-bbd7-d6ef800c901d.

with fear. Students, on the other hand, were banding together once again to decide on the next course of action to avenge their lost ones.

May Thirtieth would be remembered as a shared struggle between the students and the working class of Shanghai against colonial powers. Bringing their public display of mourning and rage to the root of the problem was the next big step in taking their movement further, as it broke the power hierarchy between the colonizers and the natives. Furthermore, it shrunk the distance of the perceived danger of their demonstrations from "just newspaper headlines" to real and imaginable peril. Whereas Steinmetz would argue that "colonial subjects and their modes of resistance are formed within the organizational terrain of the colonial state," the Chinese student revolutionaries and labor groups would push back and attest that resistance was not about fighting within the means and rules of the colonial state. Resistance, as it turned out, was about transcension and rewriting the rules. Resistance meant pushing the boundaries, reclaiming control, and eventually, becoming the state. Taking a page out of Sun Tzu's infamous war manual, students and laborers were firm in imposing their will on the enemy, taking it right into their territory.[86]

Train to Nanjing: The Overtake of the Capitol in 1931

The final outburst of calls for decolonizing Shanghai and China took shape after Japan seized Manchuria, the northeastern region of China bordering North Korea, Mongolia, and Russia, in September 1931. Some historians may argue that was the single event that was the defining pretext of World War II, recalling the League of Nations' failed attempt to outlaw wars through the Kellogg-Briand Pact.[87] In that case, Chinese student revolutionaries played a big role

[86] Tzu, Sun. "The Art of War." The Internet Classics Archive. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html.
[87] "The Kellogg-Briand ." U.S. Department of State. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/kellogg#:~:text=In%20the%20final%20version%20of,signed%20the%20pact%20at%20Paris.

in acting as China's diplomatic front for facilitating an anti-imperial, anti-colonial agenda, specifically against Japan.

Japan's violent power grab was an international showcase of their intentions and what they were capable of. Similar to the United States' Manifest Destiny, Manchuria's invasion was to bring their belief into fruition, that the Japanese were destined to unite Asia under one rule to "improve" the racial and cultural deficiencies among the region whilst competing against the West.[88] It was in Japan's national interest to move the empire to the mainland for geopolitical advantage[89] and extract the raw materials, such as coal, iron, silver, copper, and lead.[90] Never was it in their best interest to stay there but rather to exploit the Chinese labor and land resources under the guise of "improvement."

Immediate responses from the students after the invasion were loud and clear: war must be declared to preserve the honor of China.[91] However, the Kuomintang (KMT), then ruling nationalist party, hesitated to react so quickly. If war were to be declared, that would stamp out in-state discourse and appease the students. But how could such a fragmented state fight under one flag? Not even the unbridled factionalist groups, like the nationalists, communists, gangs, and all of the inner divisional makeup coerce one another to the point of unified absorption. On the other hand, if war were to be avoided, the internal conflict would ravage on, Japan would eventually want more land, and China's history would face an all too familiar story—being taken advantage of by the Western colonial powers rebranded as the League of Nations.

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[88] Hilldrup, Vincent V. "The Reasons for Japanese Imperialism (1895-1910)." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2006. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2352281.
[89] Matsusaka, Yoshihisa Tak. *The making of Japanese manchuria, 1904-1932*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2003.
[90] Bain, H. Foster. "Manchuria: A Key Area." Foreign Affairs, April 4, 2023. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/1946-10-01/manchuria-key-area#:~:text=The%20important%20mineral%20resources%20of,tungsten%20and%20less%20important%20metals.
[91] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*

Student revolutionaries caught on to how paralyzed the KMT seemed and were enraged by how they allowed the country to be trampled. Consequently, the students of Shanghai took action throughout September and October 1931 by doing their usual protest tactics and traveling to Nanjing, the current capitol, to speak directly to the state officials. Closing the gap between students and their ruling party redefined their relationship with one another as nearly equals. Not only did the Capitol sit through their demands of allowing them to freely protest without disruption, to integrate military training into their school education, and to have regular 1-on-1 delegations, but they were willing to cooperate and find a middle ground.[92] Nonetheless, the caveat lies in the KMT's secret desire to subdue the student groups and make them think that they were doing more than what they actually were. For all of the state-sponsored movement assemblies, classroom demonstrations, anti-Japanese street celebrations, boycotts on Japanese goods, and more, the KMT had finally gotten them under control while regaining their trust.[93]

In light of the student-led anti-Japanese protests, the residents of the Japanese concession started to meet and hold their own anti-China demonstrations in October 1931, just one month after the invasion. Over 3,000 residents, consisting of the Japanese concession residents and Japanese residents from 15 other Chinese cities, banded together to let it be known that Japan must "punish China" for their response.[94] There was an underlying tone, in hindsight, that spoke of misplaced self-victimization when it came to the Japanese's response to Manchuria, as they allowed for and supported the taking of Manchuria but not the obvious aftermath that was to happen.

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Rankin, Mary Backus. "The Manchurian Crisis and Radical Student Nationalism, 1903." Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i, July 6, 2011. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/402065.
[94] Fogel, Joshua A. "'Shanghai-Japan': The Japanese Residents' Association of Shanghai." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4 (November 2000): 927–50. https://doi.org/10.2307/2659217.

After the concession standoffs and Japan's boosted military presence in Manchuria, the facade wore off. Students realized that their government was never going to serve them. They held a massive parade in the streets, flaunting over 15,000 students and two guest student leaders from Beijing and Nanjing to expose the KMT for oppressing their movements all along.[95] Suddenly, when undercover agents raided the parade and kidnapped the two guests, the youths reacted with indignation. In fact, they were so abhorrent that they came to Nanjing in brigades from Shanghai in December 1931, totaling up to nearly 16,000 students from one city alone, to demand the release of the two students, a resignation from the military general for not countering Japan, and punishment of the undercover agents.[96]

A popular tribunal was even held that month, which was entirely led by the students as judge, jury, and executioner for the case of Wang Fugan, a participant of the raided party. However, what was incredibly insightful about the tribunals was not who was tried and convicted. Rather, it was the act of educated youths embodying the roles of established authorities and institutional bodies that was more impressive.[97] Historically, the scuffle between Shanghai's student revolutionaries and their government had always been about the lack of action that the state took, if any at all, to address the needs of the city and nation. No longer could they wait and dream of better days when they knew that the promise of change in due time was all wishful thinking. Institutional power was what they needed and having it was the only thing that could bring the government officials to their heels. If decolonizing Shanghai meant replacing state authorities who had more sympathy for the colonizers than their own people, then they were going to assume the role and play the part.

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[95] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*
[96] Israel, John. "Reflections on the Modern Chinese Student Movement ." JSTOR, 1968. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20023807.
[97] Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N. *Student protests in twentieth-century China: The view from Shanghai*

Final Thoughts

Conclusion

With literature surrounding China's century of humiliation from the start of the First Opium War to the end of WWII (1839-1945), political parties and social groups often receive all the credit for Shanghai's decolonization and China's liberation from foreign powers. Somewhere in the midst of the chaos lies young student revolutionaries who contributed just as much, if not more, yet are frequently swept under the rug and unfairly categorized as "others involved." While it is true that they did not exist in a vacuum or single-handedly bring China out of international shame, spotlighting their involvement and movements will shed light on their important influence on China's statecraft and help promote student revolutionaries as their own institutional collectives rather than "others involved." The city of Shanghai relied on these movements to constantly remind its inhabitants the truth of the matter, which was that it was being actively colonized though it thrived in business, entertainment, and international prestige.

The fervor, spirit, and yearn for change from this decade would become the underpinnings of Chinese student revolutionaries for years to come. Fugan's interrogation and confession during the 1931 trials would symbolically represent what the students wanted all along: truth and accountability. Years after the fact, ideas of revolution and state legitimacy would spread throughout China, ultimately leading to the demise of the KMT and ushering in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The rise of Mao Zedong and the CCP, the isolationist foreign policy period, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the Tiananmen Square Massacre, just to name a few, would all have students at the forefront of political, social, and economic transilience.

Additionally, though this essay is about the decolonization of Shanghai and the role of Chinese student revolutionaries, it is equally about the shared responsibilities of students that transcend borders. Considering the current political climate amongst university students over the Israel-Palestine war and other important events, it is now more paramount than ever to highlight their shared struggles, overwhelming sympathy, and desire for change as they will go on one day to become the next world leaders. As mentioned before, students have changed the very foundations of states throughout time. What they wove onto the fabric of history, and what they will continue to weave, will contribute to the tapestry that belongs to them just as much as it belongs to everyone else. Progress is always something to celebrate and could be fully enjoyed by all, one day, when the narrative of one hero, one story finally rests.

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"Liberty in Calcutta, no Liberty in Demerara!": Abolitionists and Indian Indenture in British Guiana, 1838-1845

Navani Rachumallu

"Liberty in Calcutta, no Liberty in Demerara!"[98]: Abolitionists and Indian Indenture in British Guiana, 1838-1845.

I. Introduction

In February 1840, a pamphlet written by the British abolitionist and Quaker John Scoble began to circulate in England. It had the lengthy title, "Hill Coolies: A Brief Exposure of the Deplorable Conditions of the Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius, and of the Nefarious Means by Which They Were Induced to Resort to These Colonies."[99] Having visited British Guiana in 1839, Scoble documented the ill-treatment of Indian indentured laborers working on sugar plantations along the Demerara River, in the northeastern part of the Caribbean colony.[100] This pamphlet and other writings by British abolitionists at the time resulted in a newfound public discourse on the "hill coolies," a term designated for these migrants, primarily young men who were recruited from towns and villages in northern India.[101]

After the abolition of slavery in the British colonies, which took effect in August of 1834, colonial sugar planters looked to new forms and systems of labor to support their export businesses. In the Caribbean, this first took shape with the apprenticeship system, where previously enslaved individuals over the age of six were legally required to work for their former owners without compensation until 1840. Designed by the British government, apprenticeship was categorized as a necessary transitional period between bondage and freedom.[102] Planters in

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[98] *British Emancipator,* July 24, 1839.
[99] John Scoble, Hill Coolies. "A Brief Exposition of the Deplorable Condition of the Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius" (London, 1840).
[100] The term "coolie" has debated origins. Scholarship has suggested that the term comes from the Tamil word for wages, *"kūli"* but became a blanket term to describe Asian indentured laborers from the 1830s and onwards. See David Northup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 60.
[101] Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 24–25.
[102] Northup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism,* 19 - 22.

the colony, however, began to argue that the end of apprenticeship would result in a shortage of cheap and abundant labor.[103] Looking for a solution, they turned their eyes towards Asia.

In May 1838, around 400 "hill coolie" men were brought overseas from Calcutta to British Guiana on a sea journey that lasted over three months. They were accompanied by 14 Indian women and 11 children.[104] Little was known about the workers themselves, and even the term "hill coolie" had dubious origins. Early accounts on indenture reference the Dhangar tribes living in the Chota Nagpur in what is today eastern India, and signified their class as poor, rural-dwelling people. But other recruited laborers also resided in Calcutta, coming from a lower urbanite class.[105] However, scholarship from the late 20th century and onwards indicates that the "coolies" came from many different towns and villages of the United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal. In addition, laborers came from a wide-range of caste-groups, many of whom were facing a lack of labor prospects at home and were enticed by the promise of work overseas.[106]

While planters sought to define Indian indenture as a free form of labor, the actual system proved to be more complicated as laborers were often unaware of the terms of their contract.[107] Accounts of coercive recruitment practices in India and mortality on passage overseas have been thoroughly examined and analyzed by scholars, such as Hugh Tinker, whose formative work in 1974 titled *A New System of Slavery the Export of Indian Labor* argued that indenture was merely a revival of the old system of slavery. Tinker claimed that the only difference between

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[103] Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* chap. 2.
[104] Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) 79.
[105] Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 54.
[106] Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830–1920* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 26-27; "Legally, there were colie recruitment offices in each district of north India, the head office of which was in Calcutta… it was not easy for recruiters [many of whom were non-licensed] to obtain labourers for overseas plantations, as it constituted a loss for the local zamindars… Hence, recruiters adopted new strategies and hung around the main roads leading to large towns, where people often roamed in search of work."
[107] Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

these two systems was that indenture was a temporary condition.[108] Following Tinker's book, scholarly work on Indian indenture has largely attempted to understand this system in relation to the institution of slavery that it was meant to replace.[109]

Abolitionist discourse on Indian indenture has been vastly understated in scholarly discussions of how this system of labor was debated and shaped. Most histories of this discourse deal with internal debates on indenture amongst anti-slavery activists, such as historian Madhavi's Kale's focus on the 1840 and 1843 World Anti-Slavery Conventions.[110] In addition, historians such as Kale and Anita Rupprecht, who studies the indenture of Africans in the West Indies, have argued that "elite abolitionists," in their efforts to advocate for free labor, simultaneously sought to maintain a "colonial plantation complex."[111] In other words anti-slavery activists were never able to separate themselves from imperial interests, as they advocated for free labor while simultaneously supporting the economic goals of the empire.[112] However, while these scholars have primarily focused on anti-slavery efforts in the 1840s and onwards, little work has been done to understand abolitionist discourse on Indian indenture when this system first emerged in the 1830s, a critical time when the image of the "hill coolie" was beginning to form in the public imagination, and when legislation on the further introduction of laborers was being debated by colonial officials.

The first abolitionist group to broach the discussion of Indian indenture in the British Caribbean was the Central Negro Emancipation Committee (CNEC). Founded by the abolitionist

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[108] Ibid.
[109] See Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire,* chap. 1. for an in-depth historiography on Indian indenture.
[110] Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, chap. 5; Here I use the term abolitionist to describe more radical groups that advocated for a complete dismantling of slavery, while anti-slavery refers more broadly to groups that were against systems of human bondage and may have taken more moderate approaches in their advocacy.
[111] Anita Rupprecht, "From Slavery to Indenture: Scripts for Slavery's Endings," in *Emancipation and the Remaking of the British Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, and Keith McClelland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 78.
[112] Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, chap. 5.

Joseph Sturge in November 1837, the CNEC was a more radical offshoot of existing anti-slavery societies. It had an important role in spreading news about the Indian laborers who were sent to work in British Guiana through their publication titled the *British Emancipato*r. Published on alternate Wednesdays from January 1838 until its dissolution in 1840, the paper claimed itself to be "the champion of the rights and liberties of mankind all over the world."[113]

In the few instances that the CNEC and its publication is written about, it is framed in a positive and even heroic light, largely because of its success in placing pressure on Parliament to stall the further passage of Indian laborers to the Caribbean in 1838, as well as in abolishing the apprenticeship system in August 1838.[114] However, the passage of indentured laborers was revitalized in 1845, with certain provisions to "guarantee" protections of workers as well as to bring in larger quantities of women.[115] This reversal, especially the decision to bring more women into a system that had largely been composed of young men, as I will argue, was made possible by the CNEC's critique of the indenture system and its portrayal of the Indian laborers' "desires" and "voices."

This paper argues that through their writings in the *British Emancipator*, abolitionists of the CNEC produced an image of the "hill coolie" as both a victim of coercion and a corrupt influence to be contained. This seemingly contradictory portrayal of the laborers allowed for a convergence of abolitionist interests with those of colonial officials and sugar planters, who coopted abolitionist rhetoric for their own goals of legitimizing the Indian indenture system. While this paper does not attempt to recuperate the historical agency of the indentured, analyzing

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[113] *Times* (London), November 23, 1838; *British Emancipator*, June 13, 1838. The *British Emancipator* ceased publication when it was replaced by the *Reporter*, the official publication of the British Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society, as noted by Kale in *Fragments of Empire*, 32.
[114] See Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* chap 1, and Charles H. Wesley, "The Abolition of Negro Apprenticeship in the British Empire." *The Journal of Negro History* 23, no. 2 (1938).
[115] See Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, 80. "When the traffic resumed in 1845, it was with a mandatory quota for women. No ship could leave port until it had recruited fourteen women for every 100 men."

this discourse on labor shows how the "voice" of the indentured was contorted and obscured not only by proponents of indenture, but also by the abolitionist group that worked to "save" them.

II. Preparation and Arrival: Anticipating Anti-Slavery Critique

Just two years prior to the publication of Scoble's pamphlet, 437 individuals in Calcutta boarded the *Hesperus* and the *Whitby* in January 1838 and began to sail towards British Guiana.[116] Only 14 women and 11 children accompanied the more than 400 Indian workers across both ships. The sea journey lasted until early May.[117] Along the way more than a dozen of these laborers passed away due to sickness and other poor conditions they faced during their travels.[118] Those who remained became the first indentured laborers to set foot in the British Caribbean.

The introduction of Indian laborers to the Caribbean started in 1836 through the efforts of John Gladstone, an owner of multiple plantations in the colony who had also been a member of Parliament.[119] Looking to acquire a sustainable source of labor, Gladstone appealed to British colonial offices, namely the Secretary of State for the British colonies, Lord Glenelg. He also corresponded with a Calcutta shipping agency, Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co, for the purposes of recruiting and transporting workers to the Caribbean.[120] In his first letter to Glenelg in March 1837, Gladstone presented a need for labor from outside the European Continent.[121] He claimed that European laborers from Portugal, Germany, Ireland and elsewhere would not be fit to work in the sugar plantations of British Guiana, due to the "influence of the climate" as well as their

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[116] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, 141.
[117] *British Emancipator*, July 25, 1838.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid. Gladstone's son, William Gladstone, would become Prime Minister of England in 1868.
[120] Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* 18.
[121] *House of Commons*, *Colonial Ordinances for the Better Regulation and Enforcement of the Relative Duties of Masters and Employers in the Colonies of British Guiana and Mauritius* [hereafter *Colonial Ordinances*], Parliamentary Paper, 1838, vol. 52, no. 180, Gladstone to Glenelg, enclosure 1 in no. 5, 23.

propensity to enjoy cheap rum, an abundant good in the colony.[122] Taking inspiration from Mauritius, which had started to bring in Indian laborers in 1834, soon after emancipation, Gladstone argued that the "hill coolie" system would be an ideal solution to the labor shortage that would result from the end of apprenticeship in the Caribbean.[123]

Wary of potential anti-slavery arguments that laborers were brought to the colony by forcible means, proponents of Indian indenture attempted to deflect these critiques and justify the creation of a new, robust labor force in the colony. Attempting to argue that indenture was a "free" system of labor, Gladstone claimed that in contrast to the African slaves, the "Bengalees" entered into contracts voluntarily, earned a wage and were able to leave for their homeland after their period of service ended. As an added bonus, their passage home would be paid for by their employer.[124] Furthering the idea that Indian workers were willing participants as well as a promising source of labor, he described the demeanor of the Indian laborers as "docile, quiet, orderly, and able-bodied People, of whom a great number are constantly employed as Laborers in Calcutta."[125]

In this early stage of indenture, a concern with the presence and proportion of women in relation to men is legible even in the perspective of a planter such as Gladstone. Aware of the "family-centric abolitionist strategy," which stressed the immorality of breaking up families and kin networks, Gladstone aimed to caution against complaints about the imbalance of male and female laborers to be brought to the colony.[126] In a letter sent to Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. in

[122] Ibid., 25.
[123] See Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, chap. 2, for a discussion on how the focus on a labor shortage was the primary means by which sugar planters advocated for Indian indenture.
[124] Ibid., 13.
[125] *Colonial Ordinances*, Gladstone to Glenelg, enclosure 1 in no. 5, 23.
[126] Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* 158; See also Bahadur, *Coolie Woman,* 79. "The evils of a sexual imbalance — and the mistreatment of slave women — had figured in campaigns against the slave trade in Britain."

January 1836, Gladstone asked for 100 "young, active, able-bodied people," and that at least half of the laborers should be married men, whose wives could work in the fields alongside them.[127]

However, when the prospect of shipping Indian laborers became a real possibility, Gladstone's initial willingness to bring in women was put on the sidelines. After the shipping agency received his request positively, Gladstone wrote to Lord Glenelg, a year after their initial communication, that the Indian workers in Mauritius "at their own desire" arrived in proportions of nine men to one woman.[128] The emphasis on the laborers' free-will displays another attempt to avoid criticisms and accusations of coercion from the part of anti-slavery activists and members of Parliament. In addition, Gladstone himself believed that women would be less productive laborers than men, proposing to pay women lower wages for field labor if they were to come to the colony.[129] Through this shifting stance on the sex-ratios of the indentured, Gladstone's ideal vision of indenture became clear - he desired to bring young Indian men who could perform the strenuous labor required on sugar plantations.

Still, other planters were worried about the anti-slavery criticisms that could impede the successful procurement of Indian laborers. Another letter sent by the colonial office to the government in British Guiana took on a completely different rhetoric to that of Gladstone. Written in April 1837, the unnamed writer claimed that he "would not be a party to the demoralizing system pursued in Mauritius of engaging only men." Claiming that Indian women were used to strenuous work, he desired "as near an equality of the sexes as practicable."[130] Others were even more concerned about outcry and criticism against this project, such as the following statement made in the *Guiana Chronicle* by a planter named William Hillhouse:

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[127] *Times* (London), April 13, 1838; reprinted letter from William Gladstone to Messrs. Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co., 1838.
[128] *Colonial Ordinances*, Gladstone to Glenelg, enclosure 1 in no. 5, 23.
[129] Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* 160.
[130] *British Emancipator,* June 13, 1838.

> The comforts of a family, and the care of its maintenance, are the last and most natural means of promoting industry in any country, I would strongly advise *neighbouring* planters to club together in chartering vessels adequate to their wants, and that the thing be *done* before the opposition of adverse interests can be consolidated.[131]

These "adverse interests," served as a clear reference to British anti-slavery groups who would condemn the system of Indian indenture as soon as they noted anything that remotely resembled the system of slavery. However, it is clear that this rhetoric only served to mitigate anti-slavery backlash, as bringing in larger proportions of women and whole families had never been a serious consideration for planters. Once Gladstone received an Order in Council from Lord Glenelg giving him permission to bring the Indian laborers overseas, no provision was enacted to require the recruitment of Indian women.[132]

Even with these attempts to keep anti-slavery concerns in mind, CNEC abolitionists in England took a hostile stance towards Indian indenture. But as will be uncovered, these abolitionists continued to depend on colonial hierarchies of racial and sexual difference that impeded their supposedly radical aims for a world free from bondage. Their fashioning of "free labor" was thus not only a humanitarian vision but became increasingly enmeshed in colonialist imaginations of the "hill coolie."

III. The *British Emancipator*: Beginnings

In December 1837, the Central Negro Emancipation Committee released its first issue of the *British Emancipator*. The following excerpt, taken from the paper's Prospectus, introduced its goals to the public with a fiery tone:

[131] Ibid.
[132] Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* 160.

> *Slavery has not been abolished!* The demon has but changed its name; and, under its disguise, it still revels in all its wonted recklessness of criminal and continues to inflict its countless wrongs, its sufferings and its brutal degradations on its hapless victims.[133]

Various members of the CNEC, such as Joseph Sturge and John Scoble, had been travelling around the British West Indies since 1836, documenting the injustices laborers faced under the apprenticeship system. In the *British Emancipator*, they reported on their findings, and aimed to "carry conviction to the minds of an impartial public."[134] Through investigative reporting, poetry, and prose, the writers of the *British Emancipator* attempted to keep their audience simultaneously enraged, informed and energized to contribute to the cause against all forms of bondage.

The issue of Indian indenture began to crop up on the pages of the *British Emancipator* in its second publication, released on January 3rd, 1838, a few weeks before the *Hesperus* set sail for Demerara. Word of Gladstone's procurement of the Order in Council had quickly alarmed the abolitionists, and the issue's front page denounced the importation of the Indian migrants set to commence later that month. The reporter ended on a passionate note, writing "we shudder at the fate which awaits the 'Hill Coolies.'"[135]

Throughout 1838, the *British Emancipator's* descriptions of indenture took on many forms, as did the strategies to argue against the introduction of this new labor source. On the whole, accounts of the inhumane conditions that laborers faced aboard their passage to the Caribbean led to a belief amongst abolitionists that the importation of the "hill coolies" was a great injustice that needed to be discontinued.[136] One thing that abolitionists agreed on was the fact that indenture, as it was outlined in Glenelg's Order in Council, allowed for a modified system of

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[133] *British Emancipator,* Dec. 27, 1837.
[134] *British Emancipator,* Jan. 3, 1838.
[135] Ibid.
[136] See *British Emancipator,* May 2, 1838. Following a report detailing the death of an Indian man on the *Hesperus*, the man having been refused permission to come on deck for want of fresh air, the editors of the Emancipator wrote "… the horrid Slave Trade is indeed about to be revived in all its loathsome and licentious activity and energy…"

slavery, some even coining it the "Gladstone slave trade."[137] Even before the *Hesperus* and the *Whitby* left the coasts of Calcutta, and before knowing anything about the Indian migrants who were set to arrive in May, descriptions of the "hill-coolies" as poor and deluded beings scattered the pages of the *British Emancipator.*[138] Reporters attempted to portray the Indian migrants as helpless beings whose only hope of freedom and survival was through the efforts of the abolitionists themselves.

Writers condemning the practice of Indian indenture sometimes went so far as to critique the imperial system itself. For example, an article by a reporter with the initials G.D angrily remarked the following:

> Wretched Hill Coolie – the whole universe is in arms against thee! Asia – thy own native Asia – plunders thee ere thou hast left her shore; the negro of Africa tortures thee at the bidding of the Satanist of Europe; and America is the soil that drinks thy blood![139]

Here, Europe is presented as a culprit in creating globally oppressive systems of economic and bodily exploitation, with the "hill coolie" being framed as the ultimate victim of an imperial scheme. The author attacked the idea of empire head-on, and then proceeded to focus on the abolitionists' newfound purpose to "tear from the statute-book those nefarious Orders in Council" that Lord Glenelg had approved the year prior, calling for a complete dismantling of the indenture system.[140]

Most writers did not go so far as to condemn the British empire as a whole, and instead focused on the particular injustices of indenture, often using arguments that were steeped in colonialist language on race. One such approach was to portray the laborers as inherently

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[137] *British Emancipator,* Jan. 31, 1838.
[138] See for example, Ibid. "[Gladstone's Order in Council puts *any* poor, unfriended man… whom the planters may choose to designate as a *Hill Cooley* from Hindostan! Into their hands, to take them to Demerara, on *any terms,* on which they can succeed in *cojoling,* or in *otherwise* obtaining them."
[139] *British Emancipator***,** May 17, 1838. It remains unclear what the author meant by "the Africans torturing the Indians." Additionally, it was common for reporters to use their initials, as it may have been deemed too risky to openly denounce this government-backed labor scheme.
[140] Ibid.

helpless and create racialized characterizations of them as weak beings, who were unable to survive in the hot climate and perform the arduous labor needed on the Caribbean sugar plantations. An article written by a missionary in the *Calcutta Christian Observer*, published in February 1838, stated that the "original inhabitants of the Western Islands, [were] a much more robust race than the Bengalis" who themselves suffered the "excessive toil attendant on sugar labor."[141] Written just a few weeks after the *Hesperus* set sail for Demerara, this article was reprinted in the *British Emancipator* as a way of advocating against the further passage of the "hill coolies." Subsequent reporters furthered this language, claiming that it took "three Bengalees to do the work of one Negro."[142]

A lack of publicized information about the conditions laborers were to face in British Guiana such as their living arrangements, wages, medical care, and the proportion of men and women to be brought to the colony also served as points of critique against indenture.[143] From this discussion, questions arose: should the importation of Indian laborers immediately cease? Or should the provisions of Indian labor be fine-tuned to allow for a "freer" system? During this point in the paper's publication, no clear vision for the future was provided, and these questions remained open.

Gladstone's Order in Council was suspended on July 30th, 1838, following reports of deaths and eyewitness accounts detailing the maltreatment of laborers aboard the *Hesperus* and the *Whitby*.[144] Investigations were also taking place within India into the coercive forces used in recruiting these laborers, which led to a suspension of overseas labor migration from the colony

[141] Reprint of the *Calcutta Christian Observer* in the *British Emancipator,* May 2, 1838. While writers of the *British Emancipator* were largely living in England, they relied on letters from other publications as well as reprints of articles from other newspapers in the Caribbean and India to gather information on the treatment of Indian laborers.
[142] *British Emancipator,* June 13, 1838. Reprint of a letter written by a British Missionary in Calcutta named Rev. Boz.
[143] *British Emancipator,* January 31, 1838.
[144] Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism*, 62.

that took effect in 1839.[145] In addition, members of Parliament, most notably Lord Brougham, an abolitionist who played a critical role in passing the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, echoed the sentiments of the CNEC against the further importation of Indian laborers to the British Caribbean.[146] But even with these successes, the more than 400 "hill coolies" in Demerara who survived their passage remained a heated topic of discussion amongst abolitionists, as they shaped their views on what a world built on "free" labor should look like.

IV. The Sex-Ratio Debate Revisited: John Scoble Comes to British Guiana

As soon as the Indian migrants arrived on the shores of Demerara on May 6, 1838, an article by the *Royal Gazette,* the government issued newspaper in British Guiana, denounced the lack of women aboard the *Hesperus*.[147] This article was immediately condemned by planters, colonial officials and major publications in the colony.[148] In response to this backlash, the editors of the *Royal Gazette* apologized for having published the article, effectively putting a pin in the controversy.[149]

Anti-indenture discourse characterized the issue of sex-ratios differently in regard to Mauritius and British Guiana, the only two British colonies by 1838 that had imported indentured Indians. A reprint of an article in December 1838 by the *Friend of India,* an English newspaper published in Calcutta, claimed that the hundred or so women shipped to Mauritius earlier that year were not the wives of male laborers but came instead "from the dregs of the

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[145] Ibid.
[146] *House of Commons*, *Mr. Geoghegan's Report on Coolie Emigration from India*, Parliamentary Paper, 1874, vol. 47, no. 314, 5.
[147] *Royal Gazette* (May 6, 1838), reprinted in *British Emancipator*, July 25, 1838. "The colony is even now suffering from the large excess of males over females among the labouring immigrants from the neighboring islands… further importations of a similar nature, bids fair to demoralize and throw back our hitherto advancing state of society(!)."
[148] See for example, *Guiana Chronicle* as reprinted in Ibid.
[149] *Royal Gazette* (May 9, 1838), as reprinted in Ibid.

Calcutta brothels."[150] The few hundred indentured women in Mauritius were often depicted as either being coerced into immigrating if they were from a "respectable" class, or, if they came willingly, as inhabiting a depraved part of society with "loose morals."[151] In contrast, during the early years of Indian indenture in British Guiana, the *lack* of Indian women brought to the colony served as the main point of critique regarding the skewed sex-ratios, as seen with the controversy surrounding the above-mentioned *Royal Gazette* article. Family and the conjugal relationship in particular were seen as crucial markers of freedom that were almost wholly absent amongst the laboring population.

While criticisms of sexual imbalances did not take a particularly strong hold on abolitionist arguments against indenture in 1838, this would all change the following year through the reporting of CNEC abolitionist John Scoble, who traveled to British Guiana in 1839. On October 17, 1838, a brief announcement was printed in the *British Emancipator*:

> This day Captain Stuart and Mr. Scoble have sailed for the West Indies, on their deeply interesting mission of mercy. Their object is twofold: first, to acquire full, accurate, and authentic information, upon all points affecting the permanent welfare of the colored classes; and, secondly, to facilitate and encourage the adoption of such practical measures as may seem conducive to the security and growth of their nascent liberties. May the Almighty Friend of the oppressed prosper their errand![152]

As soon as Scoble arrived in British Guiana in February 1839, the planters in the colony treated him with suspicion, believing the Quaker abolitionist to be a spy.[153] Scoble's previous endeavors to bring to light the abuses that laborers suffered under the apprenticeship system were seen as highly exaggerated accounts built on "partial evidence or the result of superficial inquiry."[154] Lord Glenelg himself had previously commented that Scoble's exposés were too idealistic and

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[150] *British Emancipator,* December 12, 1838.
[151] Kale, *Fragments of Empire,* 165 – 167.
[152] *British Emancipator, October* 17, 1838.
[153] *The Liberator* (Boston), February 21, 1840.
[154] *British Emancipator,* February 4, 1838.

radical, claiming that crafting a "perfect system" to replace a system of bondage that had existed for years was an impossible task.[155]

On February 25th, after having suffered from a bout of sickness right after his arrival in Demerara, a recovered Scoble delivered a speech to the "emancipated classes" at a chapel in Charlestown, a town near the capital of Georgetown. In addition to the free Black population, wealthy proprietors and managers of sugar plantations attended this speech. In the midst of cheers as well as angry interruptions from planters who believed that Scoble was attempting to cause discord between laborers and their employers, the abolitionist encouragingly reminded the emancipated population that they had the liberty to ask for a sufficient wage, and the ability to leave one "master" for another if their demands were not met. Optimistic about the free-market system, Scoble claimed that "[w]ages will always find their level," and envisioned a competitive labor market where workers were both valued and respected.[156]

Moving onto the matter of immigration, another subject that had occupied "so much of the public attention," Scoble then discussed the Indian laborers who were set to arrive a couple months later.[157] He claimed that while abolitionists like himself had stringently opposed the introduction of these Indian laborers to the Caribbean and successfully contributed to the reversal of Glenelg's Order in Council, his opposition to indenture came primarily from the "infamous and scandalous way in which [laborers] were introduced." Like the freed Black population, Scoble argued, Indian migrants could successfully constitute a "free" labor force, so long as they could choose their employers and negotiate for a competitive wage. These conditions, in Scoble's view, would provide for an ethically sound system of labor. In other words, so long as

[155] Ibid.
[156] *British Emancipator,* May 15, 1839. See also Rupprecht, "From Slavery to Indenture: Scripts for Slavery's Ending," 82. "[Abolitionists] devoted endless attention to identifying the 'stimulus to labour' under different conditions and to providing ways of calibrating degrees of freedom and unfreedom so that colonial productivity could be preserved."
[157] Ibid.

the Indian workers were granted certain rights, their recruitment to the colony would be considered acceptable – a departure from the staunch opposition against importing Indian labor of any kind that articles in the *British Emancipator* had expressed the year prior.

In envisioning what a "free" labor system could look like for Indian migrants, Scoble emphasized above all else the importance of maintaining an "equal numbers of the sexes":

> This latter point [on sex-ratios] is of the highest importance to the real and future welfare of the colony all admit; for from what but a natural source can you expect labor be increasingly supplied? and I would suggest, that any bonus that may be bestowed on those who procure emigrants, be given to those individuals who bring hither families and not male adults only.[158]

Instead of taking a fully humanitarian stance against indenture which stressed the breaking up of families, Scoble appeared to be mindful of the interests of estate proprietors in the audience. Marketing the bringing of laborers' wives as a sustainable way of supplying a labor force through the means of natural reproduction, Scoble situated his argument for "free" labor as beneficial for the white planter elite rather than for the Indian laborers themselves. Moreover, rather than wholly condemning the indenture system, the abolitionist's rhetoric coalesced around the economic interests of the empire through advocating for a reframed labor system that allowed for the importation of Indian women.

Shortly after his visit to the chapel, Scoble began to explore the various estates and plantations of Demerara. One was the above-mentioned *Belle Vue*, owned by the planter Andrew Coleville, as well as the plantations *Vriedenhoop* and *Vriedenstein* – both owned by John Gladstone himself.[159] Each estate housed only a few Indian women, with *Vriedenstein* having no women at all.[160] Reporting back on his observations in the *British Emancipator,* Scoble

[158] *British Emancipator*, May 15, 1839.
[159] John Scoble to Joseph Sturge (May 22, 1839), reprinted in *British Emancipator*, July 24, 1839.
[160] *British Emancipator,* July 10, 1839.

meticulously documented the abuses that he witnessed and learned about through interviews with both the residents and employees of these estates.

While his speech at the chapel had catered to planter interests and stressed the economic benefits of bringing Indian women to British Guiana, Scoble's rhetoric when writing to his peer abolitionists and the larger English public kept a humanitarian stance, stressing the injustices committed against the Indian indentured man. In his first published report in the *British Emancipator* detailing his visits to the above-mentioned estates, Scoble appealed to the laborers' humanity by referencing the families they left behind. He wrote, "two cargoes of Hill Coolies have been introduced to the colony, few of whom will ever again see the land of their fathers or press to their hearts the wives and children they have left behind them."[161] Scoble also mentioned the various interactions that he had with laborers on the estate writing, "Often have I heard their tales of sorrow, until my indignation has been aroused; and witnessed their tears, when they have spoken of their wives and children, and friends far away…"[162] In another report, when writing about Gladstone's *Vriedenstien* estate, which he had visited in March 1839, Scoble reported that a few laborers, who had unsuccessfully attempted to escape eastward, intended to reach Bengal, "showing their intense longings for home."[163] He continued, "I shall not forget one coolie who endeavored to make me understand him when he exclaimed, "Liberty in Calcutta, no liberty in Demerara!"[164]

Scoble attempted to frame the laborers as having a tragic and intense longing for home. While his economic arguments catered to the planter class, his humanitarian arguments were essential to the ways that the "voice" of the indentured was depicted within his published reports,

[161] Reprint of Scoble's letter to Sturge (April 6, 1839) in *British Emancipator* July 10, 1839.
[162] Ibid.
[163] *British Emancipator,* July 24, 1839.
[164] Ibid.

and thus imagined by the broader abolitionist and anti-slavery community. Putting the questionable accuracy of this quotation from the laborer aside, the stress on familial belonging served to elicit empathy from readers and made legible the humanity of the Indian man. Interestingly, articles that presented the homesickness of Indian migrants were read aloud in the colony's inferior courts during trials against abusive estate managers and other superintendents on the plantations Scoble had visited, as will be discussed later.[165] The distinct portrayal of the indentured as deeply homesick individuals thus not only impacted the way readers of the *British Emancipator* imagined the indentured, but was also crucial to the way that colonial judges evaluated these cases of abuse.

Scoble's humanitarian critiques of indenture, alongside his economic ones, were taken up by pro-indenture colonial elites to imagine ways in which the "hill coolie" system could be "fixed" and resumed. For instance, the *Guiana Chronicle*, a publication once termed as the "planters hack" in the *British Emancipator*, cited Scoble's reports and agreed with the idea that bringing in more married couples would allow for greater prosperity in the colonies.[166] Not only that, but through providing a humane and happier environment for the Indian men, a naturally reproducing and sustainable labor force could be developed in the colony. In addition, the idea that laborers were helpless beings that needed to be "saved" by the British abolitionists, served to undermine the agency of the Indian migrants, who, on multiple occurrences, actively attempted to escape the abuse they faced on sugar plantations.[167]

Abolitionists and planters' interest here converged through a merging of humanitarian and economic arguments for the introduction of Indian women to British Guiana. The solution of bringing in more women would simultaneously "cure" the homesickness of the laborer and

[165] *Times* (London), Sept. 7, 1839.
[166] *British Emancipator,* June 26, 1839.
[167] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman,* 80.

bolster the colonial sugar industry through creating a sustainable, homeborn labor source. Meanwhile, within this abolitionist discourse, the voices of the laborers themselves remained obscured, and the heavily mediated portrayal of their "desires" shifted to fit the merging interests of the abolitionists and the colonial elite.

V. The Sexually Depraved "Coolie"

While humanitarian arguments that focused on the "desires" of the laborers were central to Scoble's writings on indenture, the abolitionist had another mission; to depict the "hill coolie" as a corruption to society that needed to be contained. In other words, bringing in a primarily male population was seen as damaging the societal character of the colony itself. In a letter addressed to Joseph Sturge, the founder of the CNEC, Scoble wrote the following:

> … the great bulk of laborers introduced – say between five and six thousand – have been males. One need not draw upon the imagination to conceive the demoralization and social mischief which must ensue, if this system be continued. Unless women be introduced, at least in equal proportions to men; the general character of the population will dreadfully and rapidly deteriorate; and a blow will be struck at its future prosperity, from which it will never recover.[168]

While opposed to the further importation and introduction of Indian laborers to Demerara and the British Caribbean, Scoble again insisted that the indenture system would not only be more humane, but also profitable for the colony if women were to come along. However, a new argument emerged here: the lack of women was seen as rendering the Indian men in British Guiana as depraved and even dangerous beings. In the above excerpt, Scoble proposed that Indian men were degraded creatures who, without their wives, would wreak havoc on society. Moreover, Scoble's idea of "social mischief" seemed to hint at a *sexual* depravity of the "hill coolie" man. Although never explicitly mentioned, there was something excessive and deviant about the Indian male.

[168] *British Emancipator* July 10, 1839.

The fact of this depravity never having a specified source, models an everywhere/ nowhere model of the archive that historian Anjali Arondekar sets forth in her text *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive*. While the sexually corrupting influence of native populations is mentioned frequently in colonial archives, what exactly this "evil" consists of is rarely specified. Thus, despite the frequent assumptions and allusions to native perversity, the limited nature of the archive reveals a simultaneous absence and presence of this so-called "immoral behavior."[169] Taking on this logic, while Scoble and his writings in the *British Emancipator* never mention exactly *how* an excess of male laborers would contribute to the degradation of society, his precise lack of specificity points to a fear of the contagious and omnipresent threat of the sexual excess of the Indian man.

The refusal to define this elusive fear by Scoble and others prompts the question of what this sexual perversity could refer to. The "problem" of the single Indian man may have been due to anticipated, as well as actual sexual relations of Indian men and African women. Indications of these relationships are scarce in the archives; however, one glimpse may be ascertained through the following letter from the Governer of British Guiana, Henry Light, to Lord Glenelg in January 1839:

> The Coolies on Mr. Gladstone's property are a fine healthy body of men; they are beginning to marry or cohabit with the negresses, and to take pride in their dress… the magnificent features of the men, their well-shaped, though slender limbs promise well for the mixture of the negress with the Indian.[170]

While Light attempts to portray this racial mixing in a positive light, abolitionists seem to have painted the uncertainty and uncontrollability of the laborers' sexuality as something to be feared. To them, the Indian male migrants needed to be controlled through conjugal relationships with

[169] Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009) 10 – 11.
[170] *House of Commons*, *Correspondence Relative to Condition of Hill Coolies and Other Labourers Introduced into British Guiana*, vol. 39, no. 463, Dispatch from Light to Glenelg, January 11, 1839, 74.

women of their own race so as to prevent against sexual relationships that could disrupt the distinct racial classification and ordering of colonized groups. In addition, the so-called depravity of the laborers may have also referred to same-sex desire. As Arondekar argues, within colonial Indian archives, "homosexuality remains obvious and elusive—undeniably anecdotal (in colonial travelogues, ethnopornography, and such) yet rarely sustainable in any official archival form."[171] In other words, the colonial desire to contain same-sex desire was a pervasive force, but one that was scarcely made explicit in official capacities. Whatever the root of this fear may have been, Scoble held on to the belief that policing sexuality was essential to maintaining order among the Indian population in the colony.

As Scoble continued to report back on his experiences in British Guiana, the articles of the *British Emancipator* no longer displayed the anti-imperial stances present when the passage of Indian laborers first began. Instead, abolitionist rhetoric placed itself within a distinctly imperial consciousness that centered on the sexual difference and depravity of the "hill coolie" man. Scoble's most notable work, his pamphlet "A Brief Exposition on the Treatment of the Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius" which was published a year after his travels in the Caribbean, furthers this image of the sexually deviant "coolie." Within this pamphlet he wrote, "It is easy to conceive that, from this frightful disparity of the sexes, the most horrible and revolting depravity and demoralization must necessarily ensue."[172] Here, the implicitly sexually corrupting colonized male figure is again underscored, this time in even more vivid and exaggerated terms than in the abolitionist's earlier writings. Additionally, in this work, Scoble's appeals to the laborers' humanity through emphasizing their desire for their families was completely lost. Even his economic critiques against the continued importation of new male

[171] Arondekar, *For the Record,* 14.
[172] Scoble, "A Brief Exposition of the Deplorable Condition of the Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius," 27.

laborers went unmentioned. Rather, his positioning of male laborers as a sexually corrupting body appeared to have strengthened and overtaken other criticisms of indenture.

While Scoble and the editors of the *British Emancipator* straddled their critiques of indenture between humanitarian and economic arguments, they simultaneously emphasized the sexual immorality of the male Indian laborers to envision a "free" system of labor, one that was enmeshed in colonialist ideologies. Although the British abolitionists never took a staunchly pro-indenture stance, their depiction of the colonized male figure as a depraved object that needed to be "fixed" necessitated the introduction of the Indian woman, namely the "respectable" wifely figure. As planters started to agree with the idea of bringing in women for the purpose of creating a naturally reproducing pool of labor, the growing apprehension about the corrupting influence of the "coolie" man further brought the interests of abolitionists and planters, as well as other proponents of indenture, closer together.

VI. Working within a Colonial Legal System

In May 1839, the resident medical attendant of plantation *Belle Vue*, a man by the name of Dr. Nimmo, was convicted in the inferior courts of Georgetown for multiple accounts of abuse and neglect of the Indian laborers.[173] The doctor was charged with a fine and forced to leave his position on the estate. Closely involving himself in this case and bringing in witnesses to testify, Scoble wrote to Joseph Sturge on May 6, 1839, "I was satisfied that I had exposed him, and got him [Dr. Nimmo] convicted, notwithstanding all the efforts of intimidation and coaxing that were resorted, to defeat the ends of justice."[174] Following this verdict, twenty-seven laborers went

[173] Great Britain. House of Lords. "Hill Coolies, British Guiana; Correspondence relative to the Condition of the Hill Coolies and of other Labourers who have been introduced into British Guiana." Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 7, No. 202, Enclosure 6 in No. 18, p. 126.
[174] John Scoble to Joseph Sturge (May 22, 1839), reprinted in *British Emancipator*, July 24, 1839.

from the estate sick-house, where they had all been crowded together, to the nearby colonial hospital to address their ailments.[175]

As Scoble's reports circulated in England and British Guiana, it became well known that this medical attendant as well as other estate managers had refused to give the Indian migrants the necessary treatment to address their illnesses.[176] Attempting to find someone who could help them, some of the laborers had run to the local schoolhouse where the wife of the resident schoolmaster helped to address the flea-induced sores that many had contracted.[177]

Widely read newspapers in England such as the *Times* reprinted documents that summarized court proceedings of the convicted managers and employees of the estates charged with cruelty and abuse.[178] In addition, members of Parliament anxiously paid attention these cases, maintaining close communication with Governor Henry Light and mandating that he should under no circumstances relax his efforts "for the prevention, detection or redress of any similar evils."[179] Gladly complying, Light wrote back that he would not fail to bring justice to the laborers, and promised to prevent future occurrences of mistreatment.[180] The Governor first instituted a Commission of Enquiry to examine the management of the laborers at plantation *Belle Vue*, and subsequently began to investigate Gladstone's *Vriedenhoop* and *Vriedenstein* estates as Scoble's articles continued to ignite strong reactions and demands for justice amongst the anti-slavery members of Parliament.[181]

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[175] *British Emancipator,* August 21, 1839.
[176] Peter Ruhomon and East Indians 150th Anniversary Committee, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana: 1838–1938* (Georgetown, Guyana: East Indians 150th Anniversary Committee, 1988), 29.
[177] *British Emancipator,* June 26, 1839.
[178] See for example *Times* (London), Sept. 7, 1839.
[179] Marquess of Normanby to Governer Light as quoted in Ruhmon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana,* 30.
[180] Ibid., 31.
[181] Ruhmon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana*, 29.

The collaboration between colonial officials and the CNEC to convict offenders on the sugar plantations of Demerara led to a convergence of abolitionist and official interests. Alongside reports of physical abuse, the treatment of couples on plantations was considered of great importance by abolitionists for the well-being of the laborers, even though only two or three women resided at the plantations investigated. Scoble himself directly sent a letter to Governor Light, claiming that laborers' "wives had been forcibly ejected from their habitations by the estates' constables, under the direction of the managers and attornies."[182] Soon after this correspondence, the Governor appointed two colonial stipendiary magistrates to investigate this issue, which led to the verdict that couples should be given separate living quarters from the rest of the laborers.[183] Thus, recommendations by the abolitionist seemed to be valued amongst the colonial government as Light's Commission of Enquiry dealt with Scoble's concerns directly and promptly.

In their reports on the court proceedings, abolitionists again depicted the "desires" of the Indian laborers in order to garner sympathy for them. Inside the courtroom, the struggle to illuminate the "voice" of the laborers was most acutely felt as interpreters who were hired to translate testimonies of the indentured proved to be unreliable. In fact, within the court records, there are a few documented instances of interpreters who were found guilty of taking up bribes from estate managers to distort the statements of the Indians.[184] In one issue of the *British Emancipator,* it was reported that some laborers refused to let these malicious interpreters speak on behalf of them.[185] In addition, abolitionists attempted to counter this obfuscation of the

[182] *British Emancipator,* June 26, 1839.
[183] *British Emancipator,* September 7, 1839.
[184] *British Emancipator,* October 2, 1839.
[185] Ibid.

laborers' voice through their own writings. One CNEC reporter under the pseudonym Y.Z. wrote:

> There were five Coolies from *Vriedenhoop* and three from *Vriedenstein*, in the gallery of the public buildings – within twenty yards of the very chamber in which the Court were sitting, - entreating Mr. Scoble, in broken English, with uplifted hands, to get them sent to Calcutta to their wives, their children and their friends.[186]

For the purposes of working within colonial legal systems, language that dramatized the "voice" of the Indian migrants and emphasized their longing for home was again used to stir up empathy for the laborers. Y. Z's rhetoric here is similar to Scoble's depictions of laborers as helpless and homesick beings but was even more sensationalized. In addition, in placing pressure on the colonial government to convict Dr. Nimmo and other estate managers, abolitionists left out the image of the sexually perverse laborer that was simultaneously being disseminated through Scoble's reports in the *British Emancipator*. A distinctly humanitarian strategy was thus employed by the abolitionists in order to portray the laborers as pitiable beings that needed saving through the successful convictions of their abusers.

Even as the *British Emancipator* began to focus heavily on these cases of cruel treatment and attempted to record the "voice" of the indentured, however heavily mediated, a focus on particular injustices resulted in these cases of abuse to be deemed the "exception" and not "the rule." In other words, the problems associated with indenture were seen as being a product of a few individualized evils that could be neatly dealt with in the inferior courts of the colony, rather than being diagnosed as a wider systemic issue.[187] Moreover, colonial officials claimed that the convicted individuals did not represent the majority of planters and estate managers. In correspondence with Parliamentary officials in England, Governor Light wrote the following:

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[186] Letter to the Editor of the *Barbados Liberal* (June 10, 1839) in *British Emancipator,* August 21, 1839.
[187] Ibid.

> [The] investigations do not bear out the charges made by Mr. Scoble re ill-treatment of immigrants. I never saw contentment and health more marked than in the Coolies. I asked if they were better fed and treated in India, and their reply was that they were better fed and treated in this country and, if they had their wives and family, they would not wish to return.[188]

Here, Light dismissed the idea that the maltreatment of the Indian laborers was representative of the indenture system as a whole. The focus here shifted from the assaults inflicted on the laborers to the sex-ratio issue that had been made a central critique of indenture by the abolitionists. In discussing the separation of husbands from their wives, Light adopted the language of abolitionists in order to make a case for the continuation of Indian indenture. According to the Governor, if the "hill coolie" system could be reformed in certain ways, with a particular emphasis on bringing whole families, a more "just" and "free" system of labor could and should commence.

Light's above report to Parliament demonstrates how he began to use the abolitionist strategy of molding the laborers' "voice" to create narratives that benefitted the interests of the colonial elite. Claiming that he had spoken to the Indian migrants himself, the Governor countered the abolitionist positioning of the "homesick coolie" and argued that the laborers would *prefer* to stay in British Guiana if they were allowed to bring their families. Again, the "real" desires of the laborers were further obscured as their voice remained distorted by both colonial officials and the abolitionists. In addition, Light argued that if there had been a more balanced proportion of the sexes, the Indians in Demerara would have avoided much suffering since their arrival in 1838.[189] His adoption of abolitionist rhetoric is reminiscent of the way John Gladstone had originally proposed the importation of laborers to Lord Glenelg: both Governor

[188] Governor Light as quoted in Ruhomon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana*, 30.
[189] Great Britain. House of Commons, "Correspondance relating to Return of Coolies from British Guiana to India," vol. 35, no. 404. Governer Light to Lord Stanley, pg. 11. Also see Ruhmon, *Centenary History of the East Indians in British Guiana,* 32.

Light and Gladstone carefully catered to and anticipated anti-slavery critiques in order to make a compelling case for Indian labor.

In contrast to Gladstone, however, Light outwardly appeared to align with the abolitionists through his promises and efforts to bring justice to the ill-treated laborers, leading to a lack of critique of the Governor on the part of the abolitionists. The above mentioned abolitionist, Y.Z., argued that Light was "in entire ignorance of the wretched condition and dreadful sufferings of the Coolies under his government," and that once his attention was brought to the abuses on *Belle Vue,* he had acted quickly and with a "laudable anxiety to put an end to such atrocious proceedings."[190] Abolitionists appeared to overlook the Governor's attempts to downplay the severity and extent of laborer exploitation, instead praising Light for his swift response to Scoble's reports, which exposed the brutal conditions laborers experienced on the Demerara estates. Meanwhile, the Governer, both during and after the court proceedings, attempted to convince Parliament to revitalize the importation of Indian laborers. He argued that a reframed, more "just" indenture system was possible so long as it was tweaked in certain ways from its original form; namely in bringing women and conjugal units to the colony – a proposition that had been rigorously advocated by the CNEC abolitionists themselves.

VII. Indenture Revitalized

In 1845, Parliament sanctioned the resumption of Indian indenture, but with a significant modification: For every 100 indentured men, 14 women were required to accompany them.[191]

[190] *British Emancipator,* August 21, 1839.
[191] See Bahadur, *Coolie Woman,* 80. "[The] gender ratio fluctuated over the remaining seven decades of indenture, as colonial policymakers responded to planters complaining that it was nearly impossible to meet the quota, despite the higher bounties eventually paid to recruiters for female coolies. The quota peaked at fifty women for every 100 men before dropping to twenty-five for every 100, as concerns took hold that the wrong kind of woman was being dispatched."

The "reformed" system was resurrected and expanded to new territories beyond British Guiana such as Trinidad and Jamaica.[192]

Although the writers of the *British Emancipator* are generally viewed in the historiography on Indian indenture as radical opponents of this labor system, members of the CNEC were ultimately entangled in colonialist ideologies as they fashioned an image of the "hill coolie" as simultaneously deviant and pitiable beings. Although the idea of the sexually depraved "coolie" was not explicitly co-opted by colonial officials, both the notion that the laborers' supposed sexual deviance needed to be contained through the bringing of their wives, and the idea that they required protection through colonial governance, served to align abolitionist interests with those of the colonial and planter elite.

Ultimately, abolitionists and colonial officials reinforced a mutually constituted vocabulary for a "free" labor system, absolved from major critique. While the CNEC painted the introduction of women as simultaneously humanitarian in nature, economically beneficial, and as "fixing" the perverse and "backward" Indian male, colonial officials and planters envisioned this same "reform" as a way to legitimize and perpetuate the indenture system. The emphasis on sex-ratio imbalances also effectively overshadowed other abolitionist critiques of indenture such as the physical abuse and economic exploitation that laborers faced.

Trapped within this discourse between abolitionists, colonial officials and sugar planters were the Indian migrants. Accounts of escape from plantations, refusals to be interpreted in court by those who did not have their best interests in mind and attempts to seek medical attention outside of their estates gesture at a few acts of resistance on the part of the Indian migrants as reported by the abolitionists. In addition, most of the laborers, who had been living on the plantations of British Guiana since 1838, decided to go back to India when their contracts ended

[192] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*, xx.

in 1843.[193] Aside from these few acts which make legible the historical agency of the indentured, little is known from the reports of the *British Emancipator* about the day to day lives of the "coolies" beyond the cruelties inflicted upon them.

Subject to and silenced by an "epistemic violence" enacted by abolitionists, sugar planters and colonial governance, the historian is unable to fully recuperate the "true" voice of the Indian migrants from the discourse studied here alone.[194] The overlapping efforts of abolitionists and proponents of indenture to "speak" for the "hill coolies" contributed to the resumption of what abolitionists had once deemed the "Gladstone slave trade." This strengthened system of indenture would persist across the British colonies until its official abolishment in the early 20th century.

[193] Bahadur, *Coolie Woman,* 80.
[194] The term "epistemic violence" is borrowed from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and "In Response: Looking Back, Looking Forward," in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21–80.

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A Meditation on History: The Paradox of U.S. Influence in South Korea as both a Cultural Embrace and Historical Resentment

Zack Kaemmerlen

A Meditation on History: The Paradox of U.S. Influence in South Korea as both a Cultural Embrace and Historical Resentment

"To understand the world of today, hold it up to the world of long ago." – Kamo no Chomei

I. Introduction

The impermanence of time in Kamo no Chomei's *Hojoki* is like "the flowing river [that] never stops and yet [its] water never stays the same," and so it is doubly true "with man and all his dwelling places here on earth."[195] In light of Chomei's musings, it becomes clear that man's legacy is just as impermanent as the river, forever moving, fracturing, and recasting itself. Our past, present, and future are endlessly rewritten, reinterpreted and reproduced; not only by scholars and high-state officials, but also by the public, who live its legacies in ways that are intimate, contradictory, and often unnoticed. This phenomenon (formally labelled as 'history') transpires in both the physical and non-physical realms, operating as both a recipient and productive force.

In South Korea, the legacy of the Korean War and the nation's fraught but enduring relationship with the United States continues to reverberate across monuments, media, cultural practices, and public memory. What appears, at first glance, to be a settled historical alliance – anchored by shared oppositions to communism and Cold War military cooperation – reveals, upon closer inspection, an unresolved and ever-evolving set of meanings (extending as far as the capitalisation of words in public discourse).[196] The Cold War may have formally ended, however, the memory of it lives on, not in singular narratives, but in competing, interweaving, multidimensional layers of interpretation, affect, and contestation.

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[195] Kamo no Chōmei, *Hōjōki: Visions of a Torn World*, trans. Yasuhiko Moriguchi and David Jenkins (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996).
[196] Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 1.

Therefore, empirically-speaking, history does not change, however, the issue lies in our perception of history; where constant impermanence and quasi-elusive elements of truth(s) exist eternally. This paper aims to explore these ideas by investigating South Korea's collective understanding of the Korean War and its relationship with the United States. Specifically, it will analyse two distinct yet symbolically connected cases. First, the General Douglas MacArthur statue in Incheon and the evolving controversies like that of the 2005 protests. This will reveal the reality and tension of propagated memory with public memory in flux. Second, baseball and its enduring popularity as a sport imported by American soldiers (exposing elements of U.S. influence) but, later, naturalised into South Korean life, even as broader critiques of American imperialism have gained traction in historiography and activism.

These two cases, one monumental and contested, the other quotidian and absorbed, serve as lenses through which to interrogate the epistemic premises through which these influences are *remembered*, *encoded*, and *contested*. In other words, rather than taking history as a stable record, the paper examines it as an ever-expanding field of negotiation, shaped by lived experience, academic interpretation, political pragmatism, and cultural memory. Thus, the paper's thesis asks: How do evolving public perceptions and academic critiques of the Korean War coexist, often uneasily, with enduring cultural affinities toward the United States? Subsequently, what does this dissonance reveal about the impermanence and multiplicity of historical meaning?

II. Historiographical and Theoretical Framework

In order to understand how the Korean War continues to shape South Korean public discourse about the United States, it is necessary to move beyond political treaties and battlefield histories. Thus, this paper situates itself within a composite framework that draws on (a)

historiographical traditions surrounding the Korean War (and by extension their implications on history and how one remembers it), and (b) a broader philosophical inquiry into the nature and meaning of history. These frameworks are not merely additive; they converge on the understanding that history is less a chronicle of fixed truths but, rather, a dynamic field of perception. The combination of the two approaches brings into relief the tension between the official narratives of war and alliance, and the cultural forms through which people experience, reinterpret, and resist those narratives. While this theoretical overview is thorough, it is important preamble for the following dual-case investigation and subsequent findings.

(a) Dialectical Overview of Korean War Historiography

Historiographical treatments of the Korean War have evolved significantly over the last half-century. The traditionalist view, emerging in the early Cold War period and prevalent in the scholarly material during and shortly after the Korean War, cast the conflict as an unprovoked act of Northern aggression. This perspective emphasised the US and its Western allies as the repellent force to the post-WWII "Red Scare." This version of thought aligned with Cold War binary logics, which placed democracy against communism, order versus chaos, and played a crucial role in shaping both U.S. and South Korean public narratives. Figures like General Douglas MacArthur were lionised, while U.S. involvement was framed not only as necessary, but heroic. This view dominated much of South Korea's official narrative well into the 1970s, crystallised through monuments, school curricula, and diplomatic rhetoric.

Beginning in the 1970s and 80s, revisionist scholars, often influenced by broader critiques of U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam and Latin America, began to reinterpret the war as part of an 'imperial project.' Bruce Cumings, a key figure here, argued that U.S. involvement in Korea extended a history of colonial intervention, and that deep continuities and residues existed

between Japanese colonial structures and the U.S.-backed postwar regime in South Korea. To see the war solely as a Soviet plot is, therefore, overly reductive and outright inaccurate given the "older clash" between Japan and Korea which heavily influenced the peninsula especially during the U.S. occupation (1945-48)."[197] This shift redirected focus from great power conflict to civil strife and internal dynamics, calling into question the morality and motives of the U.S.' top-down intervention.

Later, post-revisionists and (post)-post-revisionists like Masuda Hajimu further complicated the picture by suggesting that the reality of the Cold War was not merely something imposed solely from above. Rather, it was a phenomenon where people were "factors *creating* the 'reality' of the conflict."[198] Hajimu's *Cold War Crucible* shapes our perspective by adding a non-traditional historiographical perspective of the Korean War by recentring society's role in the construction of ideological conflict… akin to redirecting power and agency back to the people. The more traditional state-centric narrative of the Cold War is rejected as Hajimu develops a more active claim that the Cold War was not simply a geopolitical confrontation imposed from above, but a socially "constructed, and staged" reality shaped through bottom-up participation, outright fear, and collective imagination. It was a co-production by ordinary citizens, media rituals, and state institutions seeking to stabilise volatile postwar societies. Hajimu's central point is epistemological: that the Cold War was not merely a military standoff but a social and psychological condition, created through consensus, repetition, and exclusion. This has direct bearing on both the MacArthur statue and the cultural adoption of baseball, each serving as a kind of social artefact whose meanings are continually constructed, toppled, and reconstructed.

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[197] Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 2.
[198] Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4.

This line of thinking finds critical resonance in the work of Samuel F. Wells Jr., who underscores how the Korean War triggered the bureaucratisation of fear in U.S. policymaking alike and "transformed the Cold War into a militarised competition between the two superpowers" (the U.S. and Soviet Russia).[199] This fear-based logic would shape not just military response but also the foundational reorganisation of national security institutions such as the CIA and NSA. Resultingly, it can be argued that these historiographical perspectives can themselves be understood as cognitive systems that disperse through borders to be absorbed by both direct and indirect participants.

As James Clear observes, "behind every system of actions is a system of beliefs."[200] Thus, these historiographical models can be understood as belief systems in which structures of assumption and value determine how data is categorised, which sources are privileged, and what constitutes 'truth.' Traditionalist, revisionist, and post-revisionist frames all arise from different assumptions about the role of the historian. So, historical narratives are never neutral; they are structured by interpretive logics that determine which events are remembered, how they are framed, and what ends they serve. What one generation frames as heroic, another may understand as hegemonic.

Thus, historiography is itself a site of contestation, and its debates are not only about facts, but about frameworks. This paper does not attempt to resolve these issues but rather uses them to expose history's contingent nature. Historical memory is not inherited wholesale but produced, contested, and remade in the friction between scholarship, lived experience, and public performance. The cases of MacArthur and baseball, examined in the subsequent sections, are not

[199] Samuel F. Wells Jr., *Fearing the Worst: How Korea Transformed the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 10.
[200] James Clear, *Atomic Habits* (New York: Avery, 2018), 32.

endpoints but entry points… they become sites where history reveals its fluid and fragmented form to the person, who acts as its perpetrator and perpetrated.

(b) Memory as Instability and Infrastructure

To analyse these artefacts, it is essential to account for how collective memory functions as a system of cultural production. Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the idea of *collective memory*, stressed that memory is not stored in the past but reconstructed in the present. Halbwachs argued that memory should not be viewed as an exclusively individual faculty, instead, he emphasised the idea that "to remember is to be connected to collective frameworks of social reference points."[201] These frameworks help coordinate memories in time and space. Therefore, memory becomes not a passive recall but an active reinterpretation, shaped by collective identity, institutions, and rituals.

Similarly, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, "sites of memory," is particularly helpful for thinking about the MacArthur statue. For Nora, these sites emerge precisely when "milieu de mémoire," or living memory, has faded or become unstable, prompting society to attach meaning to physical spaces or symbolic representations.[202] The statue in Incheon thus becomes not just a commemoration of MacArthur, but a symbolic battleground over competing understandings of alliance, liberation, and national identity.

In contrast, baseball represents a more every day, non-monumental form of memory, closer to what Jan Assmann might call *cultural memory*; the kind of memory sustained through repetition, habit, and shared cultural practices. Here, American influence does not provoke protest but is naturalised and recoded within a Korean context. This subtlety relates to Heonik

[201] Suzanne Vromen, review of *Maurice Halbwachs on Collective Memory*, by Lewis A. Coser, American Journal of Sociology 99, no. 2 (1993): 510–12, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781705.
[202] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24.

Kwon's observation that Cold War power operated not only through geopolitical decisions but also by infiltrating "the organisation of kinship… from within it as well."[203] While Kwon refers to the state's ideological use of family structure, his broader point, that systems of memory and discipline work best when internalised, helps one see how cultural forms like baseball can transmit imperial legacies without ever needing to name them as such. They become inherited gestures, or soft continuities that points to the multilayered nature of memory, where some influences are celebrated, some contested, and others rendered invisible through habitual use.

Taken together, these historiographical and sociological frameworks will guide the analysis that follows, ultimately raising philosophical questions about the ontological status of history itself. By placing the MacArthur statue and Korean baseball side-by-side, this paper does not seek to resolve the contradictions within South Korea's relationship with the U.S. but to reveal how historical meaning is continually displaced, recast, and absorbed into everyday life.

III. Case I: MacArthur and the Politics of Monumental Memory

In August 2005, protests erupted in Incheon, South Korea, surrounding the statue of General Douglas MacArthur in Jayu Park. For nearly five decades, the statue had stood unchallenged, a tribute to U.S. military intervention and the September 1950 Inchon Landing, long heralded as a pivotal operation that shifted the tides of the Korean War. But on the eve of the operation's 55th anniversary, a coalition of civic groups, younger activists, and progressive intellectuals demanded its removal. To them, MacArthur symbolised not liberation, but imperialism; the statue's continued presence reflected a Cold War-era narrative rooted in dependency, domination, and selective memory.

The controversy quickly escalated into a national debate over the meaning of history itself. As Suhi Choi explains, monuments are not merely commemorative structures; they hold "iconic

[203] Heonik Kwon, *After the Korean War: An Intimate History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 38."

status, …, in our symbolic world" where collective memories and historical interpretations are continuously contested.[204] The conflict surrounding MacArthur's image revealed both intergenerational divides and deeper anxieties over South Korea's postcolonial identity. Where older generations saw salvation, younger Koreans increasingly perceived a paternalistic intrusion on national sovereignty.

To fully understand this debate, one must trace MacArthur's evolving historiographical reception. In traditionalist scholarship, MacArthur was lionised as a strategic saviour. His role in the Inchon Landing and his unwavering anti-communism crystallised Cold War values, namely, strength, morality, and Western leadership. Wells places this within the broader context of Cold War escalation, arguing that the Inchon operation became "an epic victory," one that helped justify the Truman office's "dramatically expanded" of American strategic ambition and intensified belief in military superiority as the primary mode of Cold War engagement.[205] MacArthur's public role embodied a new geopolitical logic in which military projection and psychological symbolism became inseparable.

Other revisionist historians, particularly Bruce Cumings, dismantle this moral binary. In *The Korean War: A History*, Cumings reframes the war not as a contained conflict but as a continuation of internal Korean upheavals and more deeply rooted ruptures in Korea's colonial experience. He characterises the Korean War as one that started in 1931, "after Japanese forces invaded the northeast provinces of China and established the puppet state of Manchukuo."[206] This genealogy exposes how figures like Kim Il Sung and Park Chung-hee were shaped within an imperial setting long predating 1950, challenging any simple narrative of communist

[204] Suhi Choi, "Standing Between Intransient History and Transient Memories," Memory Studies 7, no. 2 (2014): 191.
[205] Samuel F. Wells Jr., *Fearing the Worst: How Korea Transformed the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 149.
[206] Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 44.

aggression versus democratic liberation. Within this frame, MacArthur is not a saviour but a hubristic figure, blind to the local complexities he sought to dominate. His overreach beyond the 38th parallel and calls to expand the war into China are not remembered as missteps, but as examples of American foreign policy as a "soft power" that empowered imperial residues and repressed local agency.

Post-revisionist and constructivist scholars like Masuda Hajimu push this analysis further by exploring the social mechanics behind MacArthur's myth. In *Cold War Crucible*, Hajimu argues that the Cold War was not just an international conflict imposed from above, but a "constructed reality" in which social conditions actively "maintained and propagated [it] at the people's initiative" through consensus, imagination, and everyday practices."[207] MacArthur's sanctification, then, was not just state propaganda; it was a cultural production. His statue served as a stabilising object in a fragile political landscape, shoring up Syngman Rhee's legitimacy and encoding a simplified narrative of war and alliance. The monument's permanence was its purpose; it sought to freeze history at a moment when its outcome was anything but certain.

This symbolic function of the statue must be seen in tandem with Pierre Nora's theory of lieux de mémoire ("sites of memory"). Such sites arise when "real memory" dissipates and societies seek to anchor history in objects.[208] The MacArthur statue is not merely a tribute to a man, but, therefore, an attempt to fix meaning in stone. Its construction in 1957 under Rhee's authoritarian regime was a calculated political gesture; part gratitude, part fear, and part ideological necessity summarised by the engraved testimonial to MacArthur that states, "This is a deed and this is a man to hold eternally in honoured memory."[209]

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[207] Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4.
[208] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24.
[209] Mark R. Hatlie, "Statue of General MacArthur in Incheon," *Sites of Memory*, http://sites-of-memory.de/main/incheonmacarthur.html.

Yet as the 2005 protests demonstrated, statues cannot halt the flow of time. Younger generations, shaped by democratisation, economic transformation, and increasing scepticism toward U.S. foreign policy, saw the statue not as a symbol of shared victory, but as a relic of a compromised sovereignty. For the protestors, the statue's continued presence acted as a reminder of a narrative they no longer recognised as their own, perhaps an imposed one intended for re-categorisation and renewed ownership. To expand on Suhi Choi's observation that in such conflicts in which "a statue rhetorically functions in the dynamic contexts of *time* and *space*," monuments become forms of 'lightning rods' for unresolved tensions about history and national identity.[210]

The philosophical tension is clear in that memory is not inert. As Halbwachs argues, collective memory is reconstructed in the present through social frameworks.[211] Therefore, statues like MacArthur's are attempts to materialise memory, to impose permanence on what is, by nature, impermanent. This erosion of memory, whether through protest or neglect, is not merely political; it is epistemological. This reveals that historical memory is not inherited but somehow re-authored and as with the Korean War itself, the meaning of MacArthur is never final; it is contingent on who is doing the remembering, and why.

In this way, the MacArthur statue functions not only as a case study in historical reinterpretation, but as a philosophical fulcrum. It stands at the intersection of historiography and memory studies, demanding that we challenge the function of historical memory and its authorship. Is it a lesson, a weapon, or a wound? And when memory is carved in stone, who decides when that stone has outlived its meaning?

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[210] Suhi Choi, "Standing Between Intransient History," *Memory Studies* 7, no. 2 (2012), 255.
[211] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

IV. Case II: Baseball and the Refracted Memory of Alliance

In contrast to MacArthur's statue, baseball occupies a much lesser extent of formal position in Korea's commemorative landscape. Similarly, the sport does not provoke protest, nor does it invite civic lobbying or scholarly criticism. However, its presence is no less significant. Introduced by American missionaries in the early twentieth century and later institutionalised during the U.S. military occupation following World War II, baseball became a quietly embedded form of American influence in South Korean life. Unlike statues, which aim to fix memory in stone, baseball operates through repetition, habit, and ritual. The sport acted as a soft power instrument whose efficacy lies in its invisibility.

As Joseph Nye notes, soft power functions not through coercion but attraction, embedding values and practices through cultural affinity rather than imposition. Soft power, therefore, is more of a persuasion in which "the ability to attract, …, often leads to acquiescence."[212] Baseball's rise in South Korea mirrors this mechanism. During and after the Korean War, U.S. troops brought baseball equipment, sponsored games, and promoted the sport within schools and military academies. What began as a leisure activity and "morale booster" for the soldiers evolved into a national pastime, naturalised over decades into Korea's sporting identity with notable MLB players like Ted Williams (Red Sox) and Jerry Coleman (Yankees) playing a key role in "[elevating] the quality of play."[213] By the 1980s, with the founding of the Korea Baseball Organization (KBO), baseball was no longer seen as an import but as a homegrown tradition.[214]

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[212] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 5–6.
[213] "Baseball During the Korean War: A Forgotten Front," *Historic Baseball*, https://historicbaseball.com/baseball-during-the-korean-war-a-forgotten-front/#:~:text=Impact%20on%20Major%20League%20Baseball&text=Players%20like%20Ted%20Williams%2C%20who,missions%20during%20the%20Korean%20War
[214] "South Korea Baseball Firsts and Park's Place in History," *Walter O'Malley Official Website*, https://www.walteromalley.com/international/south-korea-baseball-firsts-and-parks-place-in-history/.

Yet, as recent scholarship reveals, baseball's ascent in Korea cannot be fully understood through the lens of American soft power alone. As Karam Lee and Gwang Ok argue, the evolution of Korean baseball was neither a linear extension of U.S. cultural imperialism nor a passive absorption of Western leisure. Rather, its early development from the late nineteenth century was marked by a "multilateral process" wherein Korean intellectuals, Christian organizations, and colonial constraints all played active roles in shaping its trajectory.[215] During the Japanese occupation, baseball became a conduit not merely for American values, but for Korean nationalism, used by youth to "demonstrate the physical and mental strength" of their nation and to symbolically resist both Japanese hegemony and Western asymmetries.[216] This dynamic severely complicates any straightforward measurement of American soft power at the time because while the U.S. certainly introduced the sport and its attendant norms, the Korean people reshaped baseball into a medium of self-expression, cultural modernity, and, arguably, a kind of political defiance.

This transformation is key because while monuments like MacArthur's statue remain sites of memory, baseball represents a different kind of memorial practice. It aligns with Jan Assmann's cultural memory, a system of transmission through which values and historical associations are internalised without explicit reference.[217] Baseball does not recall the American military presence; it embodies it, not as a symbol, but as a custom. As the sport was gradually woven into local practices, from school fields to televised national leagues, it began to encode historical associations that are simultaneously American in origin and Korean in expression. Baseball no longer functions solely as a reminder of the Japanese and, later, U.S. occupation or

[215] Lee, Karam, and Gwang Ok. 2022. "The Early Cultural Evolution of Baseball in Korea (1876–1945): Unilateral Product of Cultural Imperialism or Multilateral Process?" The International Journal of the History of Sport 39 (6): 653–70. doi:10.1080/09523367.2022.2093859.
[216] Li, ibid., 661.
[217] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 125–33.

cultural transmission, but as a lived ritual whose very hybridity eludes static interpretations. In this way, unlike a statue or monument, does not present a fixed narrative, rather, its substance becomes a performative one on a shifting field of identification.

From this vantage point, baseball becomes an artefact of the Cold War; an extension of U.S.-Korean relations mediated not through diplomacy or defence agreements, but through the rhythms of sport. One could argue that its pervasiveness mirrors what Hajimu terms the "Cold War Crucible," where ordinary "local" life is shaped by ideological alignments and conformation.[218] Thus, baseball, played in neighbourhood fields and consumed through televised broadcasts, is part of this lived structure, specifically, a kind of ritualised echo of alliance rather than a declaration of it.

Yet, the very ease with which baseball has been absorbed into Korean life raises questions surrounding the ethics of cultural memory. Much of the scholarly material surrounding the Korean War points to the idea that the military confrontation also ensured a long-term U.S. presence that extended far beyond the battlefield, shaping the architecture of South Korean society and identity. Baseball was one such structure, harmless on its surface and importation, but deeply entangled in systems of power and postwar orientation. Unlike the MacArthur statue, which invites contention and thereby sustains historical discourse, baseball's quiet presence risks obscuring the historical conditions of its arrival. However, this is precisely what makes it meaningful. As with all naturalised forms, its power lies in its silence. It is not a forgotten history but an absorbed one; a historical understanding that has become societal and cultural infrastructure.

[218] Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 13.

Thus, if MacArthur's statue represents the effort to *fix* memory, baseball reveals what happens when memory becomes *unfixed*, embedded so deeply into everyday life that it escapes direct notice. In this way, the sport can not be apolitical since it is the residue of political decisions, of occupations and alliances, and of cultural engineering made durable through affect and familiarity. What emerges, then, is not a dichotomy between memory and forgetting (and subsequent re-memorisation), but a spectrum of memory's modalities. From the monumental to the mundane, the contested to the consensual, baseball becomes not a neutral pastime, but a Cold War legacy still in play.

V. Philosophical Reflection: History in Flux

The Korean War does not exist as a singular story, but as a layered, multidimensional and evolving field of meanings, always partial, always situated. The case of General MacArthur's statue reveals the memorialisation of a Cold War logic once necessary for political legitimisation, now destabilised by generational re-examinations and democratic critique. Baseball, by contrast, shows how memory can embed itself silently, as a cultural custom, eluding clear ideological alignment. Taken together, these case studies reveal two registers of memory, namely, one built to endure but now contested, the other adopted, absorbed, and reimagined. However, both reflect the deeper philosophical instabilities of history itself.

What is at stake here is not simply how the Korean War is remembered, but how historical meaning is produced. As Halbwachs reminds us, memory is not a vessel of the past, it is an act of the present, shaped by social necessities. Memory becomes most insistent precisely when it begins to fracture. In this way, history is not a stable terrain but a battlefield of collisions where facts, feelings, and narratives continually rewrite one another. This calls to mind Raymond Wiliams' "structure of feeling," the idea that there exists a pre-articulated sensibility through

which people understand their historical moment.[219] The cultural embrace of American aesthetics and practices in Korea operates as one such structure because it becomes not a conscious activity, but an unconscious one through lived experience. This force of embrace and repellence, therefore, exists alongside critical historiographies of the U.S.-ROK alliance without being negated by the latter (historiography) and, crucially, these opposing forces do not cancel each other out either. Thus, there is no clear line between cultural embrace and ideological resistance within the human framework is inevitably bound to, just as there is no final arbiter of historical truth.

In *On the Use and Abuse of History*, Nietzsche cautioned us against turning history into a weight that paralyses life, which acts as a reminder that history is not only an attempt at what happened, but also how we choose to relate to it.[220] In the case of Korea, this means accepting the simultaneity of reverence and resentment, gratitude and critique. As William R. Keylor notes, even the very recent past must be treated as history, though problems of bias and sources makes the historian of the previous decade "hard put to separate the ephemeral from the fundamental."[221] The discipline, however, remains the same, even as the underlying objects of study mutate. One's task is not to define final meanings but to explore the conditions under which meanings become accepted, contested, or forgotten.

Thus, to return to the idea that historical meaning is not discovered but negotiated, statues may be torn down and baseball games may unfold without commentary, yet the sedimented layers of human transmission remains. The Korean War, in this sense, is not over. because it still

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[219] Simpson, David. "Raymond Williams: Feeling for Structures, Voicing 'History.'" Social Text, no. 30 (1992): 9-12.
[220] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, trans. Ian Johnston, 1-2, 26. https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEENietzscheAbuseTableAll.pdf.
[221] William R. Keylor, *Twentieth-Century World and Beyond: An International History since 1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 405.

reverberates in debates, aesthetics, bodily gestures, and even silences. But if memory is unstable and susceptible to multiple interpretations, what does history have to offer?

And here, this paper must also name itself as part of the constellation it describes. Like Keylor's historian struggling to "separate the ephemeral from the fundamental," this too is provisional, shaped by my own positionality and existing condition (including this very moment's intellectual climate).[222] Thus, the paper cannot claim objectivity, only participation; offering but one beam of light among many in the image of history's coagulating, ever-expanding shape. To follow the pathos of *mono no aware*, the beauty of this paper, like that of the cherry blossom, lies in its own very impermanence. It seeks not to fix meaning, but to understand the conditions under which meaning slips, returns, and transforms. In doing so, it accepts that its own analysis might one day be displaced, reinterpreted, or forgotten… but, perhaps, that inevitability is its most honest contribution. The conclusion, then, is not to resolve dissonance, but to dwell in it, actively and consciously and to understand that history, like the blossom, is poignant precisely because it escapes full capture.

[222] Keylor, ibid., 405.

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The Pursuit of Truth: The Epistemological Story Beneath Korean War Historiography

Nicholas Calvey

The Pursuit of Truth: The Epistemological Story Beneath Korean War Historiography

"Those who control the present, control the past and those who control the past control the future." – George Orwell, 1984

Author: Nick Calvey

Abstract

This essay's overarching goal is to appropriately define the historian's role by critically analyzing the evolution of Korean War historiography. By conceptualizing the evolution of Korean War historiography as a spiral pattern that revolves around (yet toward) unresolved trauma and ideological struggles rather than a direct path toward truth, we can understand history in a more productive, healthy, and ethical way. One of the central themes of this essay is highlighting the inability of historical writing to break free from the structural constraints imposed by power structures, archival limitations, and general linguistic frameworks. Structurally, the argument is built across three interlocking levels. Firstly, the core level is a critical analysis of the transitions from traditionalism to (post)-post-revisionism in Korean War historiography. Secondly, the meta level draws upon canonical philosophers like Hegel, Foucault, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Deleuze to expose that even the most well-intentioned and radical historical perspectives (as taken by the (post)-post-revisionist scholars discussed in the core level) operate under limitations imposed by overarching frameworks that dictate visibility and comprehension. Ultimately, this study calls for an ethical approach to historiography, one that maintains historical openness and the multiplicity of truths, as well as acknowledging the continuing impacts of past events within modern power dynamics. This final, applied level productively adds to contemporary historical conversations by pointing to the necessity of

democratizing truth and unearthing the multiple perspectives that were banished to memory rather than history.

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The meaning of history does not reside in past events, but rather in our interpretations of those events. The present moment creates history through the eight billion perspectives interpreting the present at any given moment, with all of the objects, theoretical ideologies, and concepts that existed at that present moment. The historian, therefore, is the future perspectival subject that is researching and probing back into the past through documents, interviews, or objects, all in attempts to unearth a truly lived perspective at that time. Historiography, on the other hand, is specifically to do with the study of how historians have produced history, interested in the power structures, ideological beliefs, and theory of knowledge that are supported by them. Historians examining the Korean War have debated its facts ever since it entered the past, while continually reshaping its meaning as different generations and schools of thought emerged. The seemingly reactive historiographical transitions from Cold War traditionalism to fragmented human-centered (post)-post-revisionism demonstrates how previous historians have had an incorrect understanding of history, historical truth, and our access to it. The truth behind George Orwell's aforementioned quote extends beyond censorship implications in the context of 1984 to emphasize the philosophical weight and power of the wielder of memory and authority to decide what is true and what is not. In light of this discussion, this paper will propose a healthier and more epistemologically accurate interpretation of history and the historian's task within.

This single most revolutionary proposal in this argument is the reinterpretation of Korean War historiographical transitions not as linear progressions, but as a spiral pattern circling around —yet toward— unresolved trauma and contested memory. This spiraling perspective on historiographical change disputes the idea that historical understanding advances toward objective truth. Specifically, the argument aims to expose that each individual historiographical

school, whether it be one we have seen, or a future (post)-post-revisionist perspective we have not developed yet, is immediately and unavoidably restricted by structural epistemological limitations of its overarching methodology. As will become increasingly evident, any argument that is produced in written or physical form – e.g. document, photograph, or statue – immediately defines what is true to this perspective, and what is not. While this undoubtedly has methodological benefits in knowing what is not in an answer can sometimes reveal what must be explored, these perspectives are immediately forced to grapple with other self-evident truths while being restricted by structural limitations rather than progressing toward truth.[223] This is necessary contextual information to relay prior to investigating specific historical interpretations of the Korean War and the philosophy of history and epistemology.

Structurally, this essay develops arguments across three interconnected levels. Firstly, the core level analysis explores Korean War historiography. Specifically, this involves a critical genealogical examination of the internal logic behind each major school, as well as their most significant contributions and blind spots. This analysis sees traditionalist scholars like David Rees and Clay Blair. For revisionists, we explore Bruce Cumings and Allan Millett. For post-revisionists, we look to Kathryn Weathersby and William Stueck. For (post)-post-revisionists, we look to Monica Kim and Sheila Miyoshi Jager. This level of the discussion aims to show that each school constructs new structural limitations while responding to its predecessors through archival dependence, narrative framing, and political positionality.

Secondly, the meta level analysis involves philosophical arguments that challenge and destabilize the foundational knowledge claims of history and historiography. We begin by

[223] An example of another self-evident truth would be the internal conflict in Korea. Specifically, this was obviously a significant factor in causing Kim to invade South Korea on '*6.25*,' however, he was required to get Stalin's approval first. This is but one example where a historical perspective yields truths that are contradictory to one another.

explaining Hegel's understanding of historical progress as a dialectical conversation. Then, with the compounding philosophical theories of Foucault, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Deleuze, this meta level analysis will expose some foundational issues with previous interpretations of history. Finally, the applied level advocates for a healthier approach to history. The core and meta level discussions will set the foundations for the argument that a historian must be a witness and a witness only. The ethical potential of the discipline emerges from the acceptance of the historical record's instability rather than from its failure. The purpose of history writing, therefore, should be to democratize memory, aiming to create spaces for marginalized voices and maintain openness to reinterpretations through innovative technologies and platforms that exist outside of academic gatekeeping.

Overall, this essay aims to redefine Korean War historiography as a spiral centered on the impossibility of closure rather than a dialectical journey toward truth. Orwell warned that the controllers of history wield future power. When history functions as an open-ended and ongoing repository of contested narratives, no single entity can establish final ownership of the truth. This represents historiography with the highest level of honesty and freedom for those of the past and future.

Core Level: Development of Korean War Historiography

The historiographical spiral originates from a tightly wound core of Cold War traditionalism instead of an open horizon of possibilities. Emerging right after the Korean War armistice, these historians potently reflect the ideological demands of their era. Historians of this group ignored the significant internal conflicts in Korea's modern history, instead opting to focus on Moscow's grand strategy and the U.S.'s moral duty to stop Communist aggression. Historians David Rees and Clay Blair depict the war as a clear example of communist expansion that

democratic forces successfully resisted. Scholars of this era were subjected solely to state-curated archives, most of which were scarcely available until many years after they had reached their conclusions, spurring on the post-revisionist attempt to synthesize Korean War historiography with novel Soviet and Chinese sources. Specifically, they assumed that history had identifiable moral agents who help us understand causality and responsibility. Traditionalism functioned as an active force that preserved a stable view of historical events. Traditionalist scholarship established the beginning of the war at North Korea's incursion across the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950 (*6.25*), which resulted in the erasure of previous southern Korean struggles and turmoil, reducing Korean agency to fit into the global Cold War narrative structure with a defined beginning and end.[224] The spiral model shows traditionalism as the first turn around unresolved war trauma because it imposed violent categorization instead of resolution.

Traditionalism

David Rees's *Korea: The Limited War* provides the foundation for understanding the Korean conflict as the first restricted global military confrontation in an era of nuclear weaponry. As already hinted, Rees argued that the war's roots lay in Soviet-instigated aggression, which overshadowed Korean internal conflicts manifold.[225] The U.S. emerged as an essential yet limited savior whose intervention stopped a communist takeover of Asia and, therefore, the world. A vital aspect of Rees' traditionalist argument is that the war was a moral necessity since it "can only be justified when fought as a crusade against tyrants in a mood of righteous indignation."[226] Rees' Cold War geopolitical perspective caused him to disregard the post-colonial outcomes and domestic left-right conflicts that had plagued Korea well before the mid-1950s.

[224] David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 3.
[225] David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 7-13.
[226] Rees, *Korea,* 7-13.

Another worthy scholar to review within this perspective is Clay Blair. Even though his work appeared decades after its original publication time frame, this text continued to endorse the fundamental beliefs of Cold War thinking, proving that historiographical perspectives are not entirely subject to linear progressions through historical time and place. Blair, like other traditionalists, begins his account on June 25th by depicting the war as a sudden communist invasion, which forced both the UN and Washington to take action.[227] Blair's overly Western and top-down perspective is well relayed in his introduction as he takes 36 pages to discuss Truman before the word 'Korea' is ever written. This focus on Truman and the Pentagon's decision-making demonstrates Blair's traditionalist view that the Korean War began due to American unpreparedness rather than events on the Korean Peninsula.

Blair's detailed accounts of battlefield bravery and military tactics reinforced the view that the war was primarily an external assault on the Southern region. Blair's historical narrative maintains that the Korean War truly began with large military forces crossing the 38th parallel because it failed to address southern Korea's guerrilla warfare between 1946 and the start of the war.[228] The focus on military perspectives and storytelling was a common theme among scholars of this period, seeing similar exposition in Max Hastings' *The Korean War*. His history famously concentrates on significant set-piece battles at Pusan, Inchon, and back-and-forth attritional fighting from 1951-1953, just like Blair and Rees.[229]

In order to understand the differences between traditionalist and revisionist historiographies, we must first examine all the central themes of traditionalism. These scholars, like Rees and Blair, depicted the war as "the ultimate expression of the containment policy,"

[227] Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950–1953* (New York: Times Books, 1987), x.
[228] Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950–1953* (New York: Times Books, 1987), 325.
[229] Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

where the U.S. acted to protect a small nation from a major communist attack.[230] Traditionalists identify the war's start with one single invasion date (*6.25*), leading them to overlook the pre-existing civil conflicts and ideological battles in the South. The selected starting point for the narrative indicated that the conflict originated from Soviet or Chinese plans rather than domestic issues within Korea's split government. The ignorance of the latter point (political purges and ideological battles) is a theme in itself, seeing the thrusting of a civil conflict into the larger context of global politics. The conflict became recognizable as the 'Korean War' when the international-backed troops faced each other in full-fledged conflict after the North invaded in June, 1950. Traditionalist scholars tend to ignore examining both American mistakes and the controversial relationship between Washington and Seoul's authoritarian governments. Syngman Rhee's oppressive regime and large-scale executions of leftist suspects stayed hidden while moral scrutiny focused solely on the northern region for the invasion. State-sponsored records form the basis of their research and perspective, meaning their sources inevitably had enormous political bias and oversight. During the 1950s and 1960s, researchers faced nearly impossible access to Iron Curtain archives, while the experience of common Koreans from southern provinces caught in extended guerrilla conflicts rarely reached wider audiences.

Historically and philosophically, traditionalist accounts like these did not merely misunderstand past events, but created lasting frameworks that influenced how the Korean War would be understood for many decades. They serve as the foundational movement of historiographical development, which acts not as a beginning to surpass, but as the gravitational core around which all subsequent interpretations revolve. Traditionalism applied Cold War binaries and Western moral teleology to establish official state dates for the war, which subsequently justified containment logic for both geopolitics and historical memory.

[230] Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950–1953* (New York: Times Books, 1987), 327.

Overall, the traditionalist consensus as both an ideological alignment and a constrained source interpretation became established within public memory as well as policy-making processes. Its moralizing stance functioned as a permanent structural element rather than a fleeting phase. Cumings's book entered the same gravitational spiral as before, using similar archives and operating under similarly extreme ideological structures. Traditionalism failed not because it misinterpreted history, but because it created barriers that made historical knowledge permanently inaccessible.

Revisionism

Revisionist historians worked to reverse traditionalist explanations by developing methods based on Marxist structuralism, together with a more general anti-imperialist critique and postcolonial theory.[231] Showing similarities to the broader anti-government and anticolonial movements moving through the U.S., Korean War revisionism was also disruptive in nature. Revisionism developed a distinct framework that analyzed the war through class structure perspectives and indigenous resistance. However, although this new motivation was necessary and ethically ripe, it was not without its problems.

The historical shift gained momentum from widespread disillusionment following the Vietnam War. During the Cold War, the decline of public trust in U.S. interventionist policies generated an intellectual culture ready to challenge earlier stories of American goodwill. The combination of skepticism toward previous historical narratives with newfound archival access and the growing prominence of critical theory empowered revisionists to examine the foundational assumptions of Cold War-era historical research. *The Origins of the Korean War* by Bruce Cumings emerged as the definitive revisionist critique of traditional narratives through its

[231] Roberts, Priscilla. "New Light on a 'Forgotten War': The Diplomacy of the Korean Conflict." *OAH Magazine of History* 14, no. 3 (2000): 10–14.

multi-volume publication during the 1980s. The analysis method he applied depends on both Marxist historiography and structuralist analysis to emphasize class conflict along with factional violence and postcolonial conditions as the main factors behind the Korean War, rather than communist aggression.

Instead of using June 25th, 1950 as the starting point, Cumings traced back to 1945 to show how internecine violence and political purges in southern Korea predated the official war outbreak.[232] Cumings richly describes the violent reaction to communist enclaves in South Korea, showing how Syngman Rhee was helped by the U.S. in violent suppressions in Jeju and Yeosu. Through his work, Cumings expands the timeline of the war while creating a new framework that allows us to recognize the Korean War differently. This method also represents a form of *Ge-stell*, which reflects Heidegger's concept of enframing (that is, the human instinct to categorize and enframe everything). Cumings's ordering principle provides ethical and sociological foundations. However, it continues to categorize the war through an ideological framework, nonetheless.

Allan Millett continues the scholarly redirection by highlighting Korean agency from both the Northern and Southern regions. He challenges the view that Koreans were simply Cold War pawns by demonstrating how figures like Kim Il-Sung and Rhee used their international patrons to advance national interests.[233] Utilizing the sources of a new generation of Japanese and Korean historians, Millett was able to explore silenced phenomena that make the internal division argument for the causes of the Korean War undeniable.[234] Similarly, Cumings introduced western historiography to the concept of '*han*' – a culturally rooted expression of sorrow, resentment, and endurance. Cumings utilizes this Korean concept as a historiographical tool to document the

[232] Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 46.
[233] Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War: The Essential Bibliography* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2007), 29.
[234] Millett, *The Korean War*, 2.

profound emotional and historical wounds left by colonization.[235] According to Cumings, Korean motivations diverged from Western strategic rationale because they emerged from emotional roots and historical trauma. His analysis matches our conceptualization of the historiographical spiral by demonstrating that trauma is a primary force behind historical repetition instead of ideology alone.

Alas, revisionism was not without its critics. Famously, Cumings himself became a critic of historiography's search for closure when writing his next volume. Specifically, in the second volume of his *Origins of the Korean War,* Cumings accepts the impossibility of concluding "who 'caused' the Korean War? Placing that emphasis, we abandon history for politics, for philosophy, for the human terrain where there are not 'facts.'"[236] I wish to ground this critique in philosophy. Namely, this structuralist interpretation eliminates moral responsibility by prioritizing systemic forces instead of individual actors and reduces historical events to deterministic outcomes. These critiques reflect an important point in this essay's macro argument. Specifically, historiographical schools that assert to break from the dominant framework eventually set up new knowledge systems which are themselves inevitably exclusionary and limited.

While revisionism dismantled the moral binary of traditionalist historiography, it created a rigid explanatory model that favored large-scale structures and ideological interpretations instead of recognizing human complexity and uncertainty. In this way, revisionism constitutes a further spiraling around our foundational paradox of unavoidable structural limitations that both enable and restrict the process of interpreting historical events. However, the practice of revisionism demonstrates how replacing one overarching historical narrative with another only exposes the permanent impossibility of reaching historical closure since historical frameworks are nothing

[235] Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), Ch. 3.
[236] Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), Ch. 18, 621.

more than approximations influenced by contemporary issues and theoretical biases. The dialectical opposition between traditionalist and revisionist schools created the ripe conditions for post-revisionism to emerge as an attempted synthesizer of both schools' central elements.

Post-Revisionism

The promise of reconciled, empirically rigorous, and ideologically neutral historiography turns out to be just another iteration of the spiral instead of a transcendence. The post-revisionist approach developed in the 1990s during the fall of the Soviet bloc and South Korea's democratic transition capitalized on newfound archival resources and global changes in historical research practices. Through access to new Soviet and Chinese archives, scholars were able to combine traditionalist and revisionist perspectives to understand Korean domestic politics within the broader Cold War context.

Kathryn Weathersby's research on the Korean War demonstrates this analytical synthesis method. Soviet records show that Kim Il-Sung needed Stalin's direct consent for his invasion plans because of the uncertainty over the United States' potential to intervene militarily. As such, Weathersby's research confirmed traditionalist views regarding Soviet involvement alongside revisionist emphasis on North Korean autonomy. Specifically, Weathersby writes that "The Soviet leadership was concerned enough about the potential ramifications of Acheson's proposal that it began preparing a response even before receiving a request for advice from Pyongyang or Beijing."[237] However, just when progress in Korean War consensus seemed inevitable, scholars found an issue. Post-revisionism seems to be a dialectical synthesis, but its essential research method depends on state-generated documents, which exhibit the ideological biases and power structures that Foucault identified as problematic. Not only that, but these documents serve as

[237] Kathryn Weathersby, "Deceiving the Deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang, and the Allegations of Bacteriological Weapons Use in Korea," Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Issue 11 (Winter 1998), 178.

curated governance artifacts that exist within our instinct of *Ge-stell*, compelling us to impose intelligible order upon the world despite its resistance.

In William Stueck's *Rethinking the Korean War*, he merges these views by defining the conflict as both a civil war that was catalyzed by global Cold War meddling.[238] His analysis highlights twenty countries' participation to expose the undeniable international influence. Conversely, he reveals the revolutionary nationalism during the war to overcome earlier simplistic Cold War explanations.[239] Again, however, a recognizable epistemological assumption remains unexplained. Specifically, these historians are assuming that historiographical disputes can be appropriately resolved through the collection of adequate evidence. Post-revisionism overlooks the fact that archives function as power spaces where elements of silence or omission, alongside the appearance of coherence, determine historical knowledge.

While post-revisionism excels at identifying complex historical narratives, we see that it exposes knowledge's boundaries. The approach constructs a deceptive historical realism that offers illusory finality by means of synthetic conclusions. In actuality, the approach hides the truth that any attempt to create a unified historical narrative will repeat the same structural exclusions that were the very impetus for this school's emergence in the first place. For example, Weathersby excitedly claims that "these remarkable documents make it clearer why this was the case."[240] As a result, some scholars began to notice that history was not the puzzle seeking completion that all previous historians had assumed. This spurred on the final historiographical school, which sought to unearth the silenced and marginalized voices that had been ignored by the theoretical frameworks at work in the past.

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[238] William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.
[239] Stueck, *The Korean War,* 3.
[240] Kathryn Weathersby, "Deceiving the Deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang, and the Allegations of Bacteriological Weapons Use in Korea," Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Issue 11 (Winter 1998), 180.

(Post)-Post-Revisionism

The establishment of post-revisionism in Korean War studies led to the development of a scholarship movement demanding changes to historical research methods and focus areas. The shift, which has been termed (post)-post-revisionist, abandons efforts to bridge ideological divisions or merge Cold War frameworks. Whether consciously or subconsciously spotting the shortcomings of established frameworks, these new historians sought even more radical refocusing. As such, the perspective switched from ideological and top-down frameworks to the individual, humanistic, and psychosocial levels. Importantly, this approach abandoned conventional archival structures to recover silenced voices through oral histories and subaltern experiences. As we will see through Monica Kim and Sheila Miyoshi Jager, scholars of these schools employ a range of transnational perspectives and decolonial methodologies.[241] These historians moved historiographical analysis beyond simple facts to explore human construction and governance within historical narratives.

Monica Kim's *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War* stands at the forefront of this most recent transformation as it challenges the traditional perspectives of the Korean War. She asserts that the conflict represented a struggle over personhood, recognition, and sovereignty.[242] Her methodological intervention is bold as she moves the study of historical truth into the interrogation room environment. "The interrogation room, rather than being a peripheral, invisible space, suddenly became the public, explicit site of the workings of US liberal power."[243] Through such an approach, Kim completely transforms the structure of historiography by introducing an entirely novel paradigm. According to Kim, the Korean War transformed the

[241] Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 3.
[242] Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.
[243] Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms*, 9.

nature of warfare by making individual human experiences the focal point of the conflict. The prisoner of war emerged as the central battleground of Cold War liberalism to meet decolonial nationalism and psychological warfare. Through her analysis of interrogation protocols and repatriation policies, the POW was redefined as a political entity, with their loyalty and credibility becoming critical issues for both U.S. and DPRK authorities.

Kim's analysis of liberal freedom is another worthy angle to explore (post)-post-revisionist from. Specifically, the United States' voluntary repatriation policy maintained an apparent choice which was actually based on coercion and surveillance.[244] Through her analysis, Kim shows that anti-communism evolved from a set of beliefs into a performative identity that required constant demonstration. For example, young people and prisoners of war used tattoos with anti-communist messages and endured physical punishment to demonstrate their true beliefs.[245] The physical rituals of inscription highlight the historical importance of subjectivity while demonstrating that the historical truth remains inseparable from its performative conditions. Kim's research challenges archival epistemology by focusing on oral testimony and embodied experience, which defy bureaucratic recording and refuse to fit into established categories. Surprisingly, even this radical methodology fails to break free from historiography's spiral pattern. Specifically, testimony, too, is curated and mediated. Kim demonstrates that historiographical issues extend beyond authorship to include the circumstances under which the meaning of historical events becomes understandable.

Sheila Miyoshi Jager's *Brothers at War* builds upon this interruption of historical finality. Jager contests the idea of creating a new overarching story and instead claims that the Korean War continues beyond political deadlock as an existential divide which stretches over time and

[244] Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms*, 355.
[245] Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms*, 252.

place. As such, Jager asks, "how does one commemorate a war that technically is not over?"[246] The Korean War acts as a continuing wound for Jager and shapes both modern identities and national mythologies throughout the Korean peninsula and beyond. Her approach reorients the historian's task to tracing how historical trauma continues through generations and political boundaries instead of finding its formal causes or solutions.

The unified narrative of North Korean war memories, which acts as both an origin myth and a foundation for dynastic power, stands in stark opposition to the diverse and disputed war memories found in South Korea. Jager cites that much of the confusion over the war conclusion is rooted in the fact that the war "technically ended in an armistice and not a peace treaty… continu[ing] to influence regional events even though the significance of the war dramatically changed."[247] Rather than flattening this contrast into another binary framework, Jager invites us to reflect on the deeper question of narrative authorship. Namely, who holds the right to remember? Which stories get told and which ones get forgotten? By taking this approach, Jager stands alongside Kim in the view that memory is a contested space rather than a mere historical adjunct. Her work transforms the concept of war from a historical period with distinct boundaries into a perpetual atmosphere of ideological conflict and nation-building, frameworks that would never fit perfectly over the Korean peninsula.

Overall, the main feature of (post)-post-revisionism lies in its rejection of the stable foundations for historical knowledge that each historiographical predecessor relied on. Traditionalists and revisionists focused on historical explanations, while post-revisionists worked on reconciling these explanations. In the end, however, (post)-post-revisionism highlights how meaning itself remains unstable and unworthy of an academic endpoint. The war extends beyond

[246] Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 2.
[247] Jager, *Brothers at War*, 5.

decisions and battles to constitute a lasting state of fragmented identities and ideological displays of contested memories. While this was the impetus for scholars of this school to avoid archives, their oral narrative coherence fails due to similar problems. As such, the (post)-post-revisionist approach by Kim and Jager emphasizes the importance of uncertainty and pluralistic perspectives. In doing so, they expose the final turn in the spiral.

The ultimate revelation lies not in some return to synthesis but in an innovative expansion of historiography into its inherent boundaries. The work presented in this core level of this argument sets up the meta-level philosophical critique that historians should aim to trace unresolved echoes from the past rather than attempting to dominate or control it. The ethical power of history as a spiral emerges not from its advancement towards truth, but through its testimony of the unachievable nature of final resolution. As Deleuze famously metaphorized, "there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity."[248]

Meta Level: Philosophical Critique of Historiography

As shown in the previous core level of this essay, historiography remains a battleground for interpretive conflicts. On the other hand, philosophy generates a space where different possibilities can coexist even though they may contradict each other. The journey from traditionalist interpretations through to (post)-post-revisionist views of the Korean War reveals not a path to truth, but further entrapment in an unchanging structural paradox. The conceptual spiral patterns described earlier serve as a model that elucidates the epistemological entrapment by moving beyond linear or dialectical development. The core-level analysis has proven that every intellectual tradition orbits the unresolved trauma of the Korean War while generating

[248] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.

fresh perspectives that are ultimately bound by established interpretive frameworks. As such, this meta-level analysis will question whether historiography actually possesses the ability to overcome these boundaries, or if it is forever banished within the discursive structures it aims to analyze.

Hegel's dialectic forms the foundational question at the center of historical investigation. His historical philosophy describes a rational sequence where contradictions get resolved via negation, leading to successive higher unities and realities.[249] In historiography, this dialectic appears unconsciously replicated as revisionism opposes traditionalism and post-revisionism acting as a mediator. The main idea that this essay's argument supports is that this dialectic fails not by accident, but by design. Specifically, Kim and Jager demonstrate that a synthesis remains unachieved in their work. The Korean War persists through memory and trauma performances, which defy any conclusive narrative resolution. The failure represents not an endpoint, but rather a form of release from the false promise embedded in dialectical historiography. Namely, history is not a rational entity that leans towards some final resolution, nor achieves complete moral understanding.

Michel Foucault is another important philosopher whose theories about knowledge's relation to power offer a ground-breaking critique of historical truth.[250] As famously propagated in cheap quotes and gimmicks, Foucault equated knowledge to power, which subsequently allows him to reject historical neutrality as a mere illusion. He equates power to knowledge by explaining how and why institutional structures shape and filter what people can express and remember. Archives function as instruments of control rather than neutral storage spaces, as they

[249] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 79.
[250] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 111-115, 131-133.

seem (or are reported).[251] Post-revisionists like Kathryn Weathersby maintained that newly available Soviet documents would provide an accurate historical account of the Korean War. Kim, on the other hand, shows that archival materials display the subconscious marks of the ideological system that created them. For example, the records showing voluntary repatriation of POWs presented as freedom of choice actually took place in a controlling environment where surveillance and performance influenced decisions.

The lack of control that Foucault claims we have is supported and cemented by the epistemological difficulties of representation. The philosophical idea from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, stating "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," exerts significant influence on the practice of historical writing.[252] As explained in the core level of this essay, historians find themselves linguistically narrating events that were experienced non-linguistically. Specifically, history deals with events beyond linguistic capture, like the anticipatory terror of interrogation-bound prisoners and the personal turmoil from ideological deception. Language functions as a grammatical framework which constructs meaning through exclusion.[253] Thus, following Wittgenstein's logic, history attempts to transpose the indescribable into words while making the transient and emotional aspects of the event understandable. Essentially, the past cannot be captured by language because it confines the past within its amorphous structures that alter its intended meaning.

The concept of *Ge-stell* (enframing) by Martin Heidegger formalizes this particular tension. In Heidegger's view, modern technology transforms the world into standing-reserve, which

[251] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 247-250.
[252] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell (Project Gutenberg, 2010, rev. 2021), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5740, 23.
[253] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 8.

causes everything to be seen as a resource that humans can predict and control.[254] The nuanced historical articulation of this is how historiography, too, enframes the past. Historiography translates events into facts and timelines by reducing the complexity of past events to create a coherent present-day understanding. Importantly, historians' conceptual frameworks that reduce the complex lived experiences of the Korean War are those of the present, not the past. Therefore, another angle through which to critique history and historiography is by opposing how historiography transforms Being into data, just like we do with technology.

As a result of these critiques of history and historiography, we are left with the conundrum of what mechanisms allow difference to resist objective capture. Gilles Deleuze offers the most holistic answer in this regard. Together with Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze developed his rhizome theory in direct response to traditional hierarchical and linear epistemological frameworks.[255] Biologically, this anti-teleological rhizome theory develops through multiple connections in the past and future, as well as acknowledging the lateral links between nodes that are part of a broader and unpredictable reality. Where this theory excels, beyond Hegel's linear dialectic, is in its unspecified start and finish. This perspective views history as more than just a chain reaction of causes and effects. It is a field of becoming, wherein history is an open field where affective ruptures blend with memory and conceptual collisions and contradictions.

Applied Level: New Outlook on History

Now that the core and meta level of this argument have been relayed, this argument now turns to the applied level. Specifically, we now turn to the contemporary historian's need to adapt

[254] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), xxix.
[255] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

one's approach when the past refuses to settle into a definitive narrative. Through this re-imagining of history, historians can no longer construct consistent stories or distinguish between conflicting truths. Historians must now function as cartographers of complexity by mapping out the missing pieces of memory, trauma, and contradiction without forming a conclusive narrative. The Korean War historiography structure spirals to show our progress, not being a linear advancement, but as a continuous rotation around unresolved issues. Applying this understanding to the Korean War, historians must adopt this revelation as the ethical impetus for their continued, anti-institutional probing into the past.

Current historiographical work should also focus on the acknowledgement that every historical narrative is constructed through power dynamics and linguistic frameworks that exist within the present moment. Historians should practice responsible engagement with this reality instead of denying it, and they should focus on reopening unresolved questions instead of searching for permanent truths. As such, this reasoning calls for historians to continually trace how past events continue to affect subsequent time periods through novel perspectives instead of treating it like a wieldable tool. Applied to Korean War scholarship, historians should engage with the democratization of historical memory.

Democratizing history requires reducing historians' authority and elevating marginalized voices that remained outside mainstream historical accounts. Historical research requires breaking the archive's exclusive hold on legitimacy through recognition of oral testimonies and affective memories as valid sources alongside local knowledge. While these informal historical sources get criticized for the inability to verify their truth, the core level analysis shows us that the supposedly confirmed and legitimate sources from state archives are themselves manipulable and fundamentally perspective-laden. Thus, while oral accounts are less confirmable, this

weakness risks overemphasizing the legitimacy and truth of legitimate sources and archives. Historians must commit to constructing a pluralistic collection of historical records by taking historiography outside academic institutions and into public spaces. Community memory projects and digital storytelling are but a few modern movements trying to actualize this collaborative requirement. True democratization means constructing structures that enable marginalized perspectives to challenge established historiographies from an equal position. Historical research about the Korean War needs continuous interaction with diasporic communities with radical openness to maintain ethical research practices. Historians must identify affected individuals and analyze how and why their lives were disrupted while preserving these narratives in hopes of preventing legitimate historical violence from fading into forgotten history.

Overall, this argument calls for historians to adopt the understanding that all of history, including that of the Korean War, stands as an ongoing phenomenon, with useful information seeping out of every imaginable direction. As expressed in the meta level of this essay, historians should approach repetition as an indication of history's dynamic nature rather than as evidence of failure. While more challenging, this novel path aims to appreciate history's spiral motion as a phenomenon that realizes the gaps as its core truth and pursues them. To follow this path is to recognize that the historian's true contribution is continued revelation. Thus, historiography achieves its ultimate purpose only when we recognize its role as an ongoing ethical practice that addresses current conditions and amplifies voices traditionally excluded from historical narratives.

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