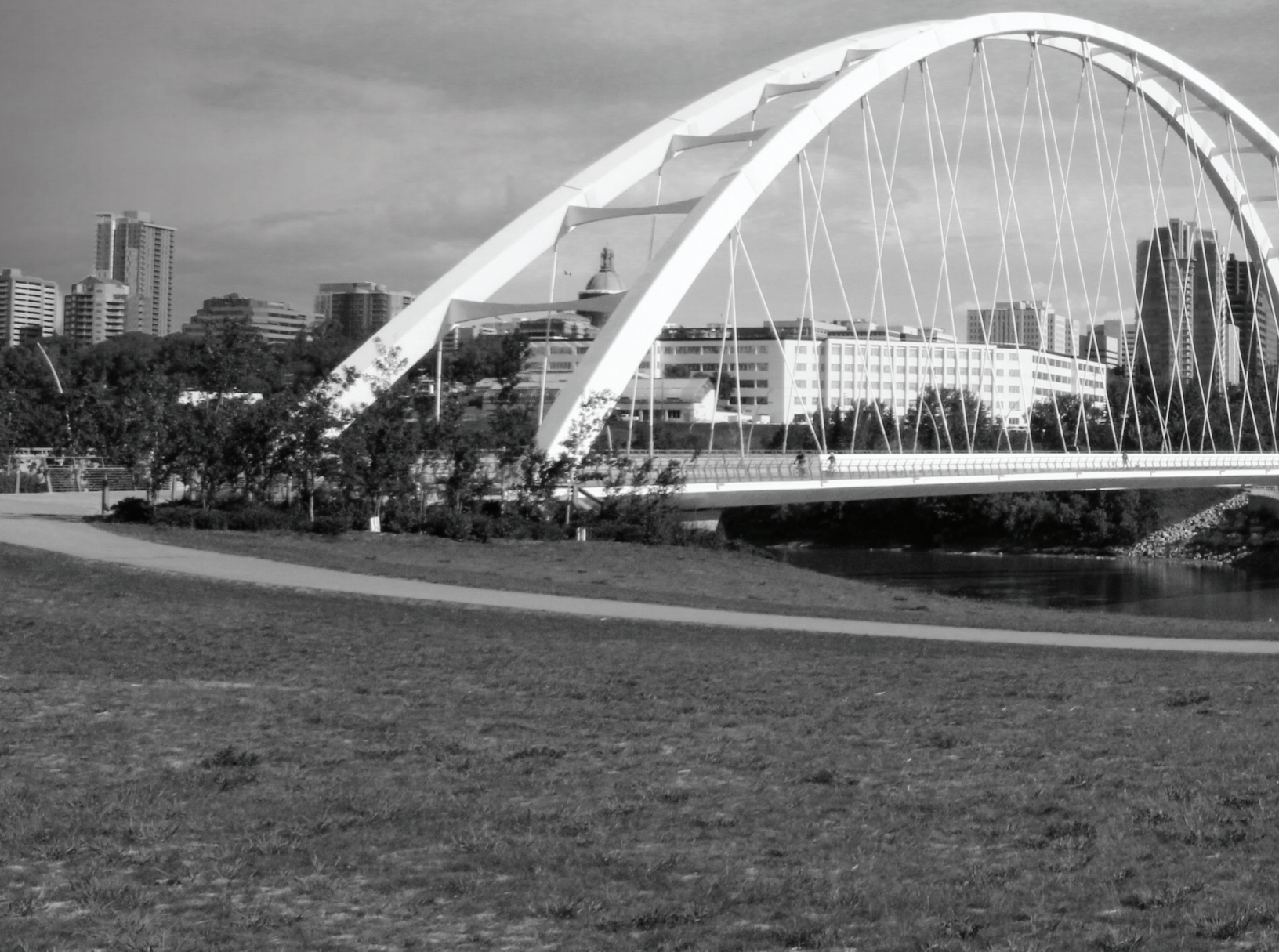
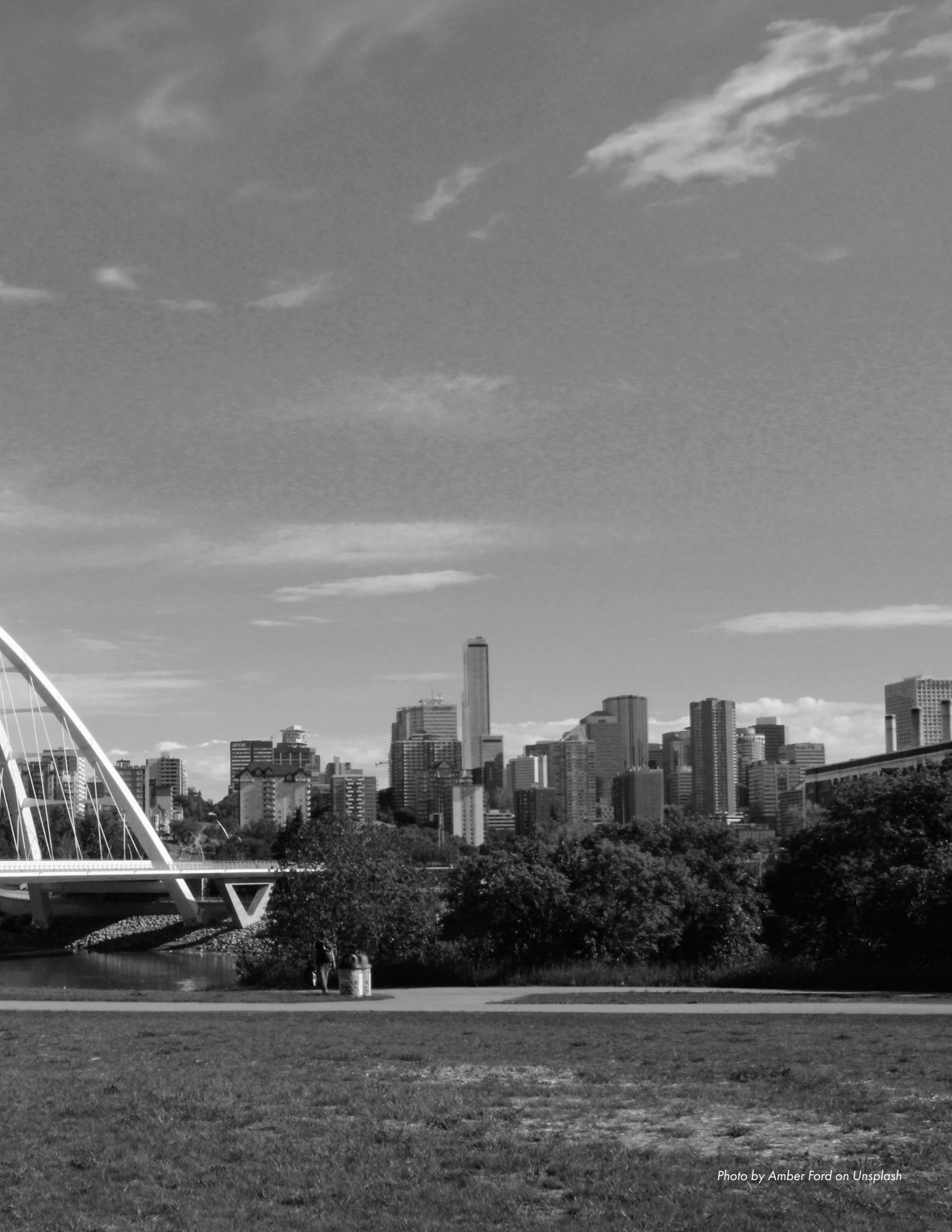
Stories of Hope

a collaboration between crossings: undergradute arts journal and the political science undergraduate review

Land Acknowledgement

The Organization for Arts Students and Interdisciplinary Studies, Crossings, and The University of Alberta respectfully acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Naktoo Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.





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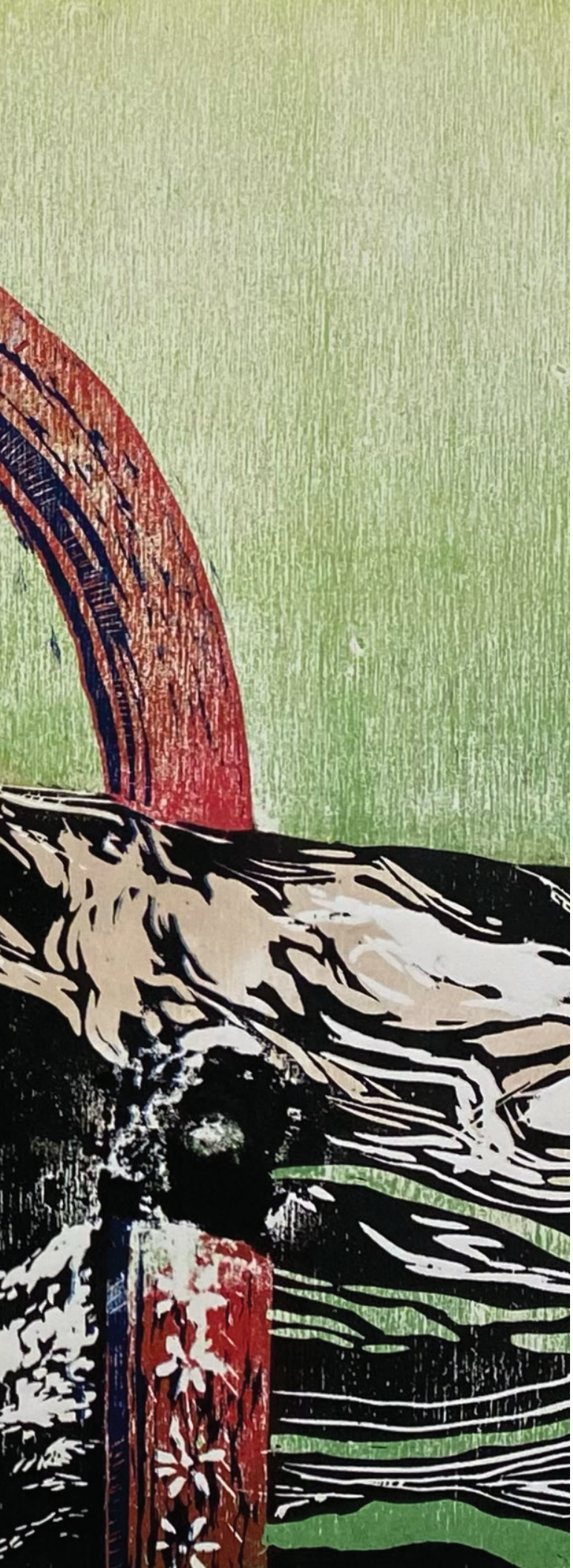
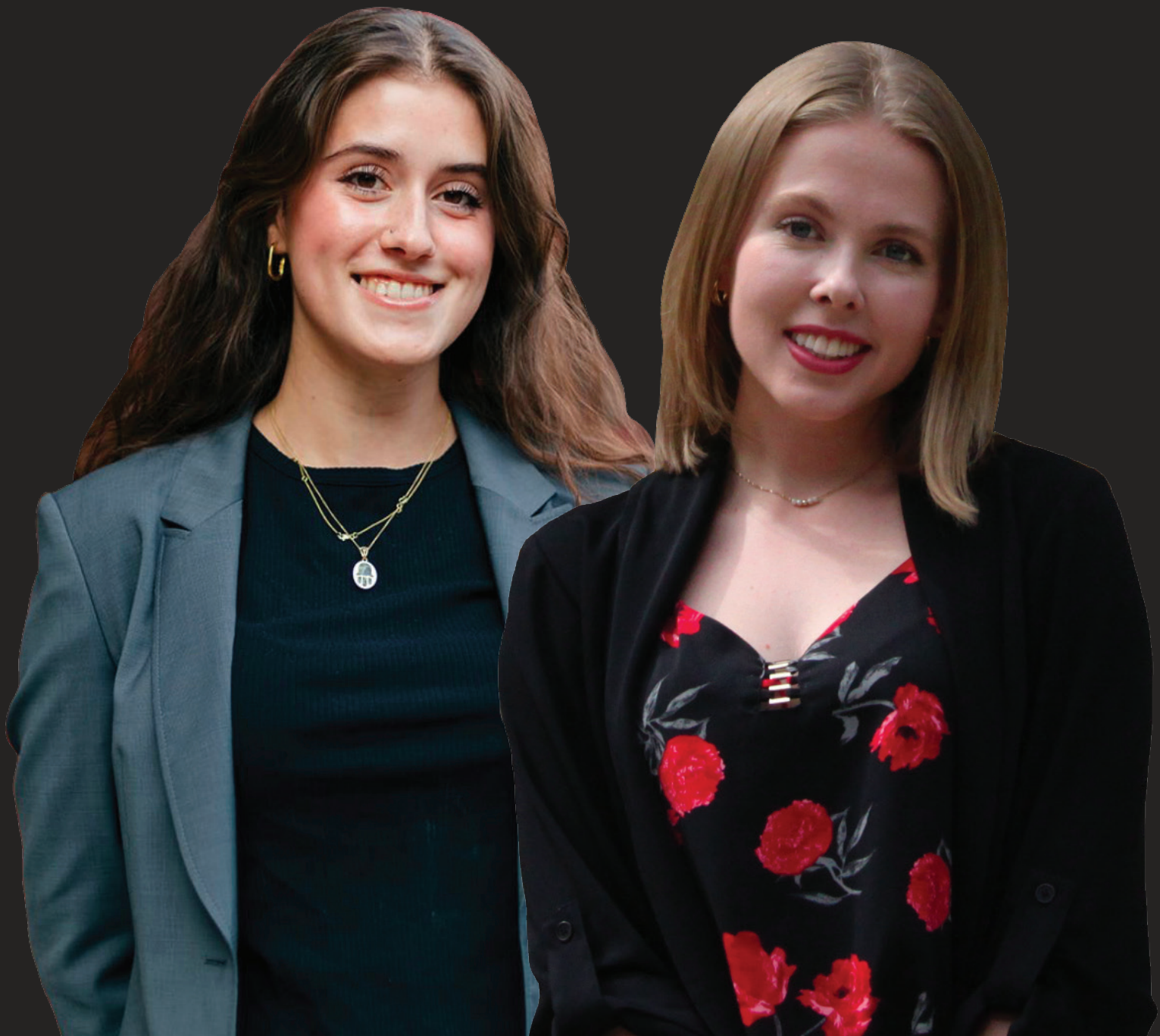


Welcome

An undergraduate student journal and the Political Science Undergraduate Review (PSUR) are proud to present the special edition, Stories of Hope.
The inspiration for this unprecedented collaborative effort stemmed from a renewed focus within the Faculty of Arts on resilience of the Arts community in the face of ongoing global challenges related to climate change, armed conflict, and human rights abuses.
In response, the editorial teams of Crossings and the PSUR aspired to create a platform for students to express their hope through academic pursuits.
The focus of this volume is stories of hope which features research and art showcasing cultural revitalization, hope, and humanitarian assistance.

Gavriel Kesik-Libin + Hailey Lothamer



On behalf of the PSUR and Crossings, Gavriel Kesik-Libin and myself would like to thank all of the contributing authors and artists, without whom this special edition would not have been possible. We are also immensely grateful for the review and copyediting teams of both the PSUR and Crossings who, despite the increased workload necessary to complete this special edition, did not sacrifice the quality of this publication. Their knowledge and dedication to undergraduate research is immensely appreciated and serves as a reminder of the great possibilities within the Arts community.

Together, we would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the support we have received from the faculty and our other invaluable support from the University of Alberta Libraries. The executive teams of the Organization for Arts Students and Interdisciplinary Studies (OASIS) and the Political Science Undergraduate Association (PSUA) for their support and encouragement.

We hope that the work featured in this volume will serve as a reminder of hope and inspire faith amongst our readership for a brighter future. In order to provide a moment of reflection for our readers, this volume is designed to feature a select few articles and visual artworks on varied topics. To the reader, we wish you a moment of calm reflection and a meaningful reading experience as you progress through this volume.

Hailey Lothamer
Editor in Chief - Crossings

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The Limitation of Human Rights Discourse in Ushering Transformative Change

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Discipline: Political Science

ABSTRACT: Within the context of this paper I will explore Human Rights discourse and the ways it attempts to usher in transformative change more rightly their lack of change. Because human rights are social and cultural constructed relying on institutions and state actors to enforce and uphold their practice, Human Rights as a practice can often fail to uphold the protection of human dignity. The purpose of this paper is not to say that human rights dont have a place within society as defenders of human dignity rather to recognize its limitations in addressing the cultural, political and economic challenges faced by people and cultural groups.

KEYWORDS: Human Rights, Transformative Change, Individual Rights, Institutions, Social Constructivism

In examining the concept of Human Rights, one might contend that their emergence in global discourse stems from the massive human rights violations of World War II and the institutional responses that followed them, such as the UN Commission on Human Rights signed in 1946. However, as depicted by Samuel Moyn in The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History (2012) the history of human rights is not as clear as our modern understanding of them lends us to believe. Human Rights ultimately emerged in modern vernacular as a substitute for other utopias of 'collective entitlement and self-determination', ie; socialism and anticolonialism, as a sort of consolation prize for those who needed them the most (Moyn 2012, 45). A historical examination of the other utopias provides insight into the emergence of human rights as a manifestation of the heartfelt desire for making the world a better place (Moyn 2012, 225).
At the surface, it is easy to regard human rights as just this, and in some ways one can easily point to human rights as a meaningful ideological protection for human dignity. However, this view is ultimately limiting, and establishes fixed notions/understandings of human rights that are resistant to challenges and criticisms. Human rights are not a discourse of significant change because their utopian assertion of universality often fails, and their existence relies on specific social institutions to establish, enforce, and protect them. Additionally, their codification leads to ideological conflicts on national and international scales when attempting to apply rhetoric that is not truly universal.

Human rights are defined as rights held by individuals and groups on the basis of their humanity that protect and assert dignity against state and independent actors. They are meant to compel power holders such as governments and employers to protect the communities they claim to represent (Brysk 2018, 3). The emergence of human rights as a concept in global, governing rhetoric is due in part to the failures of later utopian theories such as post-colonialism and self-determination, as explained by Samuel Moyn in The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History.
As he argues, human rights emerged and are established based on the idea that they require low economic and political sacrifices in comparison to other utopian counterparts of socialism and anticolonialism. Human rights thus entered our vernacular as a "throwaway line" and a means to "interrupt normal interstate relations," not as an ideal/framework for world governance. This is exemplified by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's use of human rights as a determinate of "norms that the state could go to war to protect" in 1942 (Moyn 2012, 51). Or, the use/employing of human rights discourse as a Cold War position to justify the invasion of Vietnam in the mid-1950s. Thus, human rights became the "ultimate victim of their own vagueness" (Moyn 2012, 64), and were mobilized by western countries, specifically the United States of America, to enforce post-colonial dominance on other nations under the guise of implementing international law and protecting individuals from communist thought (Moyn 2012, 84).

The vague definitions of human rights impacts their ability to come to fruition. In Madsen and Verschraegen's (2013) Making Human Rights Intelligible, the authors argue that for human rights to meaningfully exist they "must become institutionalized socially and become embedded in people's mindsets," (8). This means humans rights discourse has to be effectively communicated and taken up simultaneously within our daily social lives and our political establishments. Given that the modern state has been the primary driver and enforcer of rights, the global/transnational institutionalization of human rights presents a sociological dilemma. The institutionalisation of human rights presents an issue for creating change as they "presuppose the willingness and ability of individuals to resort to the courts for the enforcement of rights" (Madsen and Verschraegen 2013, 10).
An example of this failure is explored in an article by David Engel and Frank Munger (1996), "Rights, Remembrance and Reconciliation of Difference," which highlights the lives of two women living with a disability during the emergence and years following the implementation of the American Disability Act (ADA). Although Engel and Munger attempt to argue the importance and beneficial social changes that the ADA had on these women's lives, in reality the ADA gave them very little agency in terms of employing their rights legally. For example, both women expressed hesitation in asserting their rights out of fear for potentially undermining their own careers. As noted by one woman,

Sarah Lane, she feared creating the appearance that "her disability makes her different, less capable, [and] less independent" by asserting her rights through the court system (Engel and Munger 1996, 25). Additionally, the emergence of legislative disability discourse wasn't effective in getting Sarah hired when compared to the social discourse and values in diversity programs of the time that often cited how it was "cool" to have Sarah there, essentially tokenizing her presence (Engel and Munger 1996, 22). For human rights to be transformative, those who they impact must be able to assert them without fearing negative legal and social outcomes/implications.

For human rights to create transformative change within society, they require the follow-through and support of state actors. Alison Brysk (2018) describes an optimistic view, arguing "human rights do not equal and cannot automatically produce justice" but that they help "guarantee […] a fair and open space to seek justice" (96). This, however, cannot be the case when it is up to governments to provide this space.
Brysk, in her "citizenship gap" concept asks the question "who is human" (Brysk 26) or in other words, who is considered by government powers humans/citizens that have rights. The foremost issue when relying on government institutions as the gatekeeper for rights is that even in democratic states that support and accept treatises and declarations on human rights, certain people (such as women, refugees, and persons in marginalized communities) are unable to access their rights as they are not considered a citizen or 'human'. For example, the USA has created zones of exception (where national and treaty obligations don't apply) like Guantanamo Bay, where the state processes and detains Caribbean migrants, or the more than 2,000 asylum seekers housed in the Manus and Nauru by the Australian government. These groups face violence and human rights violations daily. Human rights can only be a discourse of transformative change if state actors are actively and universally applying them, not if they are creatively circumventing them by creating loopholes and selectively choosing 'who' is human and where their rights exist.

The legalistic approach to human rights entails the individualisation of rights, and effectively "ignores the ways in which breaches of rights operate in a collective and institutional way, and cannot easily be attributed to individual subjects" (Madsen and Verschraegen 2013, 10). This is exemplified by Montgomery (2001) in their work, *Imposing Rights? A case Study of Child Prostitution in Thailand*. Montgomery argues that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child fails to account for complex and nuanced cultural circumstances unique to individual youths that cannot be solved with a top-down approach, but rather require community-level work to be properly analyzed and studied. "When imposing rights from above and removing children from their families in the name of universal human rights," states do not address the social and economic structures of poverty which create the vicious cycles that make children vulnerable to the violation of their rights (Montgomery 2001, 97). Moreover, punishing the children's parents through legal means, as accorded by Article 9 (87), can ultimately exacerbate and harm the children's other rights, such as Articles 5, 8, 19, 26, and 27 which deal with family support. This does not result in a comprehensive, holistic solution or ensure that the dignity of children will be upheld. Therefore, legalistic human rights discourse regarding the implementation of children's rights is not transformative as it does not address the core issues that result in the rights of children being violated. Rather, this approach inadequately attempts to deal with a far greater and more serious issue.

Human rights declarations being universally ratified serves more as a testament to the moral achievements of states, than to their actual efforts to stop violating the basic rights of their citizens. When human rights doctrines attempt to assert themselves as universal, they propose a misguided assumption that ignores how human rights are constructed "by and in society" (Madsen and Verschraegen 2013, 9). As Madsen and Verschraegen argue, "the common association of human rights with universal and foundational claims about humanity easily leads to interpretations presuming that human rights can exist without social preconditions, or even beyond the realm of society" (7).
However, in doing so, they overlook the caveat that because rights are described in vague, aspirational terms, they can be interpreted in multiple ways, allowing for national governments to easily shrug off legal

obligations and declarations. For example, the rhetoric of human rights as gender-neutral has been critiqued in feminist theory as being inadequate for addressing concerns of gender and human rights. Wanda Wiegers (2009) while explaining the limitations of human rights in custodial cases, argues that an attempt to champion equality and human rights here erases the essential issues at hand. This is done by essentializing the importance of a parent's genetic relations to a child, therefore discounting the physical and emotional labour that goes into parenting, regardless of a biological relationship. Wiegers presents the Saskatoon Dad case in which the father ('Adam Hendricks') "contested the de-facto custody of an infant boy who had been transferred by his birth mother ('Rose Swan') to another family, the Turners, shortly after his birth" (Wiegers 2009, 2). Despite the father being absent during the pregnancy, Hendricks' biological position as the child's father established his claim receiving as much weight as Swan's (3). Similarly, in Lori Chambers' work (2010) '*In the Name of the Father': Children, Naming Practices, and the Law in Canada*, she presents the Trociuk case, where an unmarried father asserted his right to impose his name upon his children at the time of birth, despite his non-existent relationship to the mother (12). The assertion that both biological parents have equal rights and decision-making powers regarding a child, regardless of their presence in the child's life, highlights the challenges faced by the women and mothers asserting their rights in these cases.

The failure of human rights as universal rhetoric arises from the fact that while they are ideologically designed to represent society as a whole, it is up to dominant structures and social institutions to establish and enforce these rights. Thus, minorities who may not align with dominant powers must often change their personal narratives to better align with dominant understanding of human rights. While human rights are seen as universal, cultures are not. For example, Sieder & Withcell (2001) argue in their work, *Advancing Indigenous Claims through the Law: Reflections on the Guatemalan Peace Process*, for the importance of Indigenous identities in Guatemalan political discourse. These identities further the rights of these groups through the use of 'foreign' legal strategies that shape the way they are represented and perceived within dominant legal discourse (201). Ultimately, this reduces Indigenous cultures into categories and customary norms which can more easily be codified within the legal system (213). This poses the question of whether human rights are an appropriate discursive strategy when working from an international perspective, and what sort of balance must be struck between the imposition of western conceptions of human rights on indigenous groups. This conflict highlights the limitations of human rights in their ability to engage meaningfully in a discourse without losing the nuances and complexities of given cultural contexts.

The setbacks of human rights discourse and its inability to be transformative as discussed above becomes further evident through its assertion of universality, and the corresponding use of "vernacularization". This is the process where international concepts are situated, adapted and translated [to specific contexts], attempting to make non-local concepts meaningful to local audiences, whether successful or not (Goldstein 2013, 111). If human rights are to be transformative and universal, they should not have to require the translation of a discourse or legal applications to fit local vernaculars. Contradictory understandings of human rights can emerge when attempting to translate them to other cultures such as in the Barrios in Cochabamba, Bolivia, as illustrated by Daniel Goldstein (2013) in *Whose Vernacular?: Translating Human Rights in Local Contexts*. Goldstein's analysis argues that through multiple vernacularizations, "competing understandings of human rights can emerge, often differing greatly from their intended transitional meanings and values" (111). For example, the Cochabamba police have employed the human rights rhetoric as an explanation to the rise of crime. Police officers are often found stating in the press "that laws that limit the arbitrary detention of suspects and require evidence of guilt to incarcerate them are detrimental to citizen security" (116). This context positions the police as local vernacularizers/ translators, who claim that human rights are a hinderance to the safety of the local communities. Resulting in locals mistrusting and misunderstanding their core purpose (their protection). This example highlights the limitations of human rights as a holistic discourse, as they lack a shared and agreed-upon understanding of what the implicit values of human rights predicate.

Our understanding of human rights thus far is that their goal is to fulfil and protect human dignity. However, when attempting to fulfil a subjective understanding of an individual's human dignity, the human rights framework begins to contradict itself. Human rights cannot be a transformative discourse when the expectation that competing rights are being upheld is simultaneously brought forward. Susan Okin (1999) makes the argument in *Is Multiculturalism bad for Women* that when asserting cultural group rights, individual rights should not be looked over. In particular, this can be applied to intersections of culture and gender, such as the impacts of 'cultural practices' like pressuring rape victims to marry their abusers, a practice common in some communities in Latin America, rural Southeast Asia and parts of West Africa (Okin 1999, 15). In advocating for the group rights of cultural minorities, liberal societies do not address these issues. This is because liberal states view cultural groups as "monoliths," ignoring the differences in beliefs within them and avoiding what happens in more private spheres, like households (Okin 1999, 12).

This tension between the private and public spheres is also highlighted by Janice Stein (2007) in *Searching for Equality*, who analyzes the contradictions that enforcing human rights can have when protecting religious practices that might be discriminatory, but still protected under Canadian laws pertaining to religious freedoms. An example of this might include allowing public officials and justices of peace to refuse officiating same-sex marriages if they violate their religious beliefs and freedoms (11). To be clear, this argument is not as elementary as implying that discriminatory actions can take place as long as they are protected under religious freedoms. Waldron (2013) explores this conflict in her book *Free to Believe*, arguing the alternative. She argues that when the equality of rights comes into conflict with freedom of religion, equality will win out every time. When rights come into conflict with one another, it necessitates a proper balancing of rights on the part of the judiciary, and the prioritizing of the importance of some rights over others (Waldron 2013, 165-166). For example, in *Bruker v. Marcovitz* "a private claim to the exercise of religious freedom was denied by the courts" (Waldron 2013, 67). Ms. Bruker and Mr. Marcovitz were married and then divorced under Canadian law, however, they were both Jewish and for a divorce to be accepted [in the religious sense], the husband had to provide a *get*. Without one, Ms. Bruker would not be considered divorced or able to re-marry according to her religion (Waldron 2013, 67). Ms. Bruker ultimately won the case, however Waldron argues that this was an infringement on Mr. Marcovitz's religious rights. Because Ms. Bruker could frame her argument as an issue of equal rights, she won. Regardless of the result, cases like these set a precedent for the discourse of human rights and religious freedoms. Another example of equality of rights being positioned this way, is in the argument made in the case of the Hutterian Brethren of Wilson Colony, who were denied the ability to have a driver's license without photo identification in order to align with their religious values. Because their argument couldn't be one of equality like in Bruker v. Marcovitz, the courts were not as favourable.

In the previous pages, I have explored the limitations that human rights discourse has in creating transformative change. Human rights are socially constructed, and socially implemented through our cultural and political institutions. Because they are enshrined in a state-centred legal system, they place their importance on the role of the state in enforcing them, or on individuals for calling upon the justice systems to gain access to protection. However, human rights as a discourse of transformation fails when the barriers to do so are either too great socially, as depicted by the example of Sara Lane and Jill Goldings hesitation to assert their rights under the ADA; or, are inaccessible due to governments decisions to ignore human rights discourse as illustrated by Alision Brysk with the citizenship gap. Furthermore, in the attempt to make human rights a universal doctrine, advocates fall short in their ability to address the intersection of issues present in the rights discourse, illustrated by Wiegers and Chambers' discussion of gendered custodial battles. Likewise, international cases of mistranslations and the opportunistic co-opting and vernacularization of human rights contradicts the fundamental values of human rights. Lastly, human rights discourse is limited in its ability to be transformative because in its goal of primarily protecting the dignity of one person, the rights of others can simultaneously be limited, as illustrated in the competing rights case of collective vs individual illustrated by Wiegers and Stein, and religious rights versus equality rights as illustrated by Waldron. This is not to say human rights don't have a place within society as defenders of human dignity; but rather, by recognizing their limitations, there can be an ushering in of new tools to better address the cultural, political and economic challenges faced by people.

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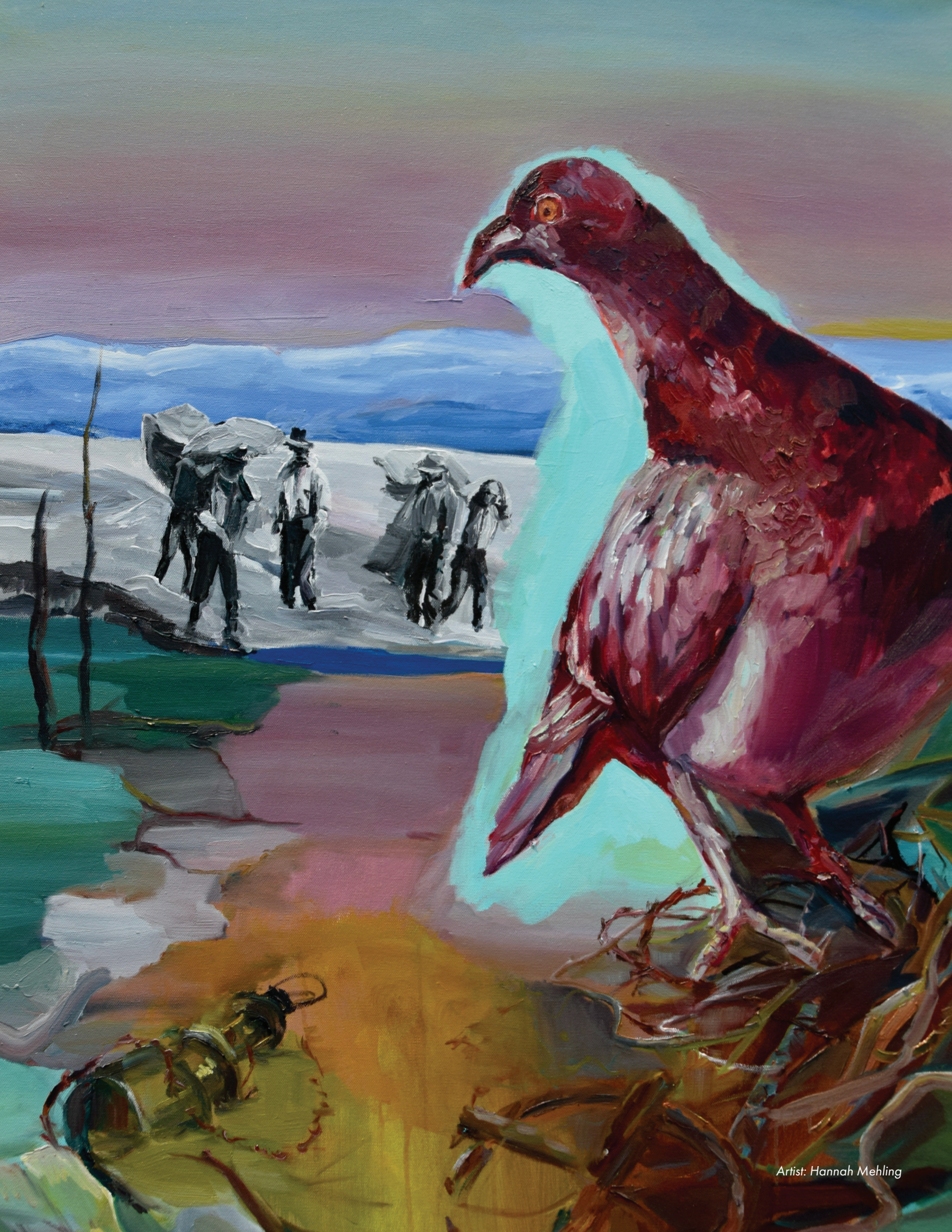

Artist: Hannah Mehling

Clash Of Civilizations, Orientalism, and the "Civilized" and "Uncivilized"

Comparing International Reactions Through the Cases of the Middle East and Europe

Author: Hussain Alhussainy
Discipline: Political Science

ABSTRACT: This article examines Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" theory which suggests that the world will be divided into two opposing civilizations, the West and East, in the post-Cold War era. Huntington advocates for Western society to exert control over Eastern civilization, particularly the Islamic world, in order to maintain Western values and beliefs. Additionally, I examine Edward Said's criticism of this theory, which argues that Huntington's theory is based on ignorance and portrays non-Western societies as backward and uncivilized. This article demonstrates how Samuel Huntington's theory is very much present in the way conflict is viewed in different regions and civilizations around the world, as observed through modern Orientalism. This is demonstrated by the double standards and differential treatment of Eastern and Western conflict by Western nations and their media's portrayal of Eastern conflicts as upholding the norm. I then highlight these differences in treatment by comparing the reaction and action of Western nations to the Russian invasion of Ukraine versus the invasion of Iraq by the United States.

KEYWORDS: Islamaphobia, Clash of Civilizations, Orientalism, Global Response, Political Theory, Post-Colonial Theory, Media Representation, Identity

Samuel Huntington's (1993) Clash of Civilizations theory emerged during the post-Cold War era as an argument that stipulates a transfer or shift in our political system: from one rooted in ideology to one that is based on the domination of opposing civilizations. The struggle for domination of culture contributes to Islamophobia by influencing members of society and its institutions. This theory is framed "as a symptom rather than a root cause" (Bazian 2018, 1). On the contrary, Huntington's argument was the catalyst of Islamophobia by citing the Clash of Civilizations as something inevitable due to non-Western societies' inability to modernize and function to Western ideals and standards, causing these societies to be categorized as backward. In this paper, I will explore and highlight Huntington's Clash of Civilizations argument. Secondly, I will examine how Huntington's theory is refuted by Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Lastly, I will examine and highlight the effects of Huntington's theory on the normalization of war in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA)/ Islamic societies. This is because of the ways his theory highlights the Eastern Orient as inherently uncivilized, and in need of intervention and modernization of society. I will do this through the lens of Edward Said's Orientalism by comparing and contrasting the reaction and action of two major conflicts–the US invasion of Iraq and the Russian invasion of Ukraine–thus highlighting the double standards of refugee policy concerning these distinct conflicts.

Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Argument

Samuel Huntington's (1993) Clash of Civilizations thesis is a derivative of his view that there are several civilizations, and in the 21st century, they will clash over their differences. Huntington's (1993) thesis states that Western civilization, which he defines as Europe and North America, dominate the world, while Eastern civilization represents China, Russia, the Middle East and many other 'less developed' countries. Huntington (1993) argues that these two civilizations will inevitably clash due to their contrasting values and views. Accordingly, this would posit that the West is more liberal and democratic than the East, while the East is more traditional and authoritarian. He argues that this contrast is inevitable in all civilizations, but there are important differences between them (Huntington 1993). His first argument is that Westerners and Easterners have distinct experiences of history. He states that Westerners tend to view history as a timeline in which societies obtained civil and human rights (Huntington 1993). He also states that this is the case in most of Latin America and the Caribbean, all of Western and Central Europe, Japan, and Israel (Huntington 1993, 24). He argues that in most of Eastern Europe as well as China, India, Iran, and Iraq, the cycle of history produces different truths and these differing views on history are natural causes for tension (Huntington 1996). These justifications are problematic because they pose the idea that the Middle East inherently and inevitably in contrast the culture, politics, and overall beliefs of the West. In simpler terms, this paints the Orient as the opposite of the Occident, the West.

Huntington's (1993) second argument is that the two civilizations have different economic interests and therefore will differ in their foreign policy. He argues that Western civilization values economic and technological growth, while Eastern civilization places more emphasis on cultural preservation and stability (Huntington 1993). He suggests that this means that Eastern civilizations will be less inclined to enter military alliances with Western nations (Huntington 1993). However, Huntington (1993) argues, without sufficient evidence, that Eastern countries are culturally inferior because their cultures are founded on the premise of collectivism and survival of the fittest, rather than on Western philosophies of individuality and self-determination. He says that Eastern countries refuse to give up old traditions, such as communism in China or feudalism in Korea (Huntington 1993). At the same time, they refuse to adopt Western ideals like democracy, free trade, and capitalism, which he believes will lead them to become more developed (Huntington 1993). Huntington (1993) also asserts that Asian countries are far less tolerant of each other and their differences.

Huntington (1993) describes non-Western society as barbaric, savage, and uncivilized. In his view, the only way for these countries to improve is by receiving guidance from Western religion and culture. He concludes that it is their destiny to be tied to the West due to its greater ability and natural inclination towards civilized society and that areas of culture that differ from Western society must be rejected as inferior (Huntington 1993). Huntington (1993) questions the decisions of non-

Western countries to oppose Western influence, which he interprets as resisting destiny. According to Huntington (1993), the West has a right to spread its values and cultures as it is beneficial to all nations. He believes that many people outside the West have a misconception about their own interests and value systems, in effect working against their own welfare (Huntington 1993). Islamic society is depicted as torn by internal strife, which he says can only be settled with 'external pressure' (Huntington 1993, 31). In Huntington's (1993) view, uncivilized countries may receive assistance to help them overcome their difficulties and come up to par with Western standards. However, they must also be forced to accept the cultural superiority of Western society, and the West should do whatever it takes to maintain its dominance in global affairs, as failure to dominate would allow non-Western countries to revert to their uncivilized ways (Huntington 1993).

Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism and How it Refutes Huntington's Argument

The influence of postcolonial thought and subjugation of the Orient (non-Western societies) has played a foundational and critical role in how the Orient is subjugated to negative and downright harmful narratives that serve to alienate and promote otherness, thus serving the perpetrators of the dominant discourse. The "Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West and North America) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said 1979, 1-2). As such, the West was able to take hold of the dominant mainstream idea of what it means to be civilized and modernized and was then able to justify their perspective of the Orient as uncivilized and backward, providing a vehicle to further their colonial ambitions. Edward Said's (1979) starting point in Orientalism is that the existence and development of every culture impel the existence of a different and inevitably competitive 'other' or 'alter ego'. Therefore, the West, mainly Europe, in attempting to construct its self-image, created the Middle East (the Orient) as the ultimate 'other'. The Middle East (the Orient) and the West (the Occident) do not correspond to any stable reality that exists as a natural fact but are merely products of construction. The Orient is constructed in order to establish a hierarchical relationship between the West and East, firmly labelling non-Western practices and society as a whole, as a product of underdevelopment. This needed to be addressed by 'aiding' the East by imposing Western views and exploiting its natural resources in the name of modernizing its economy. Through Said's theory of Orientalism, Huntington's Clash of Civilizations argument is nothing more than a clash of ignorance. As explained above, Huntington understands the Orient's practices of non-Western society as inherently dangerous and negative due to them not being in line with Western standards. Said (1979) advances the argument that both colonial and post-colonial schools pose that cultures within respective societies adhere to a strict idea of what society looks like and how it may function, which may lead them to reject each other for the cause of preserving identity. This highlights how Huntington's theory predicates the idea that where there are inherent cultural differences, there is inevitable war because of the failure to comprehend these different ways of life. He goes on to argue that without this 'us versus them' mentality, there would be no war (Said 1979).

Analyzing the Inaction Regarding the Iraq War

Orientalism influences the narrative of Middle Eastern conflicts by observing the differences in the public and informal discourse such as the media, and formal discourse and action such as United Nations (UN) resolutions and sanctions.

The reaction to the Iraq invasion is important to compare with the responses following the Ukrainian invasion primarily because of its stark differences, despite having similar legal justifications and narratives. During and after the Iraq invasion, there has been a never-ending and contentious debate among theorists and scholars as to why the US invaded; these range from actual 'sincere' concerns regarding possible weapons of mass destruction to the US's desire to placate materialist interests (Butt 2019). As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared the invasion a violation of the UN Charter, it went ahead with no clear UN backing (MacAskill and Borger 2004). While there was definitive pushback against the invasion, as the US and its ally Britain were able to veto resolutions made in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC 2002), no definitive formal action in the form of sanctions or resolutions could be made against the Coalition of the

Willing (Wivel and Pest 2010, 429). Nouri's (2021) analysis of the invasion, applying Orientalism, is concerned "that there is selectivity in the interpretation and application of international law in the Middle East" (186). Additionally, the Coalition of the Willing members involved small states who were incentivized by economic rewards from the US and therefore were compelled to participate and support. But the glaring lack of tangible ramifications the US could have faced by the international community is not solely due to Iraq's isolation from the international community, compared to contemporary Ukraine's comparatively wider recognition. In addition, it is due to the othering of Iraqi culture that Western society was unable to empathize with them, due to political influences causing them to see their cultures at odds.

Analyzing Action Taken Regarding Ukraine

In the face of Russian aggression, there has been united indignation from Western media, popular culture, and academia, which runs in contrast to the mixed, aloof discussions and even celebrations of the American invasion of Iraq (Mitrovica 2022; Farhat 2022; Cook 2023). The US's reaction against the Ukrainian invasion continues to be fierce, existentialist, and binary; US President Joe Biden's March 26th speech in Poland was interpreted by many as a call for an end to Vladimir Putin's regime and reignited the Cold War and World War II narrative of the democracies of the West fighting against autocracy and oppression (Megerian, Gera, and Madhani 2022). The significance of UNSC resolution 2623 and the subsequent widely supported UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution was a signal that the international community was united in calling for an end to the war and the dispatch of humanitarian aid (UNSC 2022; Al Jazeera 2022). Formal international pressure through sanctions has also pressured multinational corporations into suspending operations in Russia. More than 450 multinational companies have either scaled back, suspended, or entirely halted operations in Russia a month after the invasion (Sonnenfeld and Yale Research Team 2022). Additionally, more than 3.7 million Ukrainian citizens have fled to the European Union (France 24 2022). The bombardment of wide-ranging sanctions (ranging from energy embargos to targeting the Russian financial system directly), the acceptance of millions of refugees from supposedly anti-immigrant governments in Poland and Hungary, and the united calls for peace, lie in stark contrast to not only Iraq, but to current wars and conflicts in the Middle East (Funakoshi, Lawson, and Deka 2022). Thus, it is necessary to directly compare and contrast these reactions.

Comparing Reactions

The US and Russian invasions had disturbingly similar legal justifications for violating Section 51 of the UN Charter under the argument that a "pre-emptive" strike was necessary to eliminate those planning to attack (Farhat 2022). Yet the evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was refuted by the international community, including long-standing allies of the US such as Canada and Germany (Cook 2023). Similarly, Russia's claims of Ukraine's "Nazi" regime and alleged genocide against Russians have been rejected as Russian propaganda (Reuters 2022). Indeed, the Iraq invasion was seen as the swift end to a post-Cold War multilateral front heeded by the US and instead questioned and instigated tensions against the US's unipolarity (Ambrosio 2006, 1206). However, these two narratives both attempted to justify a war in the environment of the international system that makes it exceedingly difficult for conventional wars to be conducted. This is because, in a "Westernized" global order, wars are "treated as opposite to usual (conventional) wars being waged for saving and assertion of identity (nationalism, patriotism), ideas (national interest) and ideology" (Poiarkova 2022, 24). In Poiarkova's (2022) article on otherness with regard to identity politics in the Russo-Ukrainian war, she asserts that modern warfare is more to do with "state ruining" (23) rather than all-out conquering. This is true because Russia's haphazard and limited use of its complete military arsenal in Ukraine suggests it is in the pursuit of regime change, as was the US's explicit goals of regime change in Iraq and, by extension, its entire Middle Eastern strategy (Bala 2022; Weiss 2022; Heilbrunn 2020). Both wars aim for a destabilized state apparatus using limited conventional means. This is evident in Russia's strategy of limited, strategic strikes and incursions, and the US's precise attacks and invasions into Iraq. While there are essential differences in the geography, strategy, and overall doctrine, these are two fundamentally similar, Western, and imperialist states seeking domination in a domination-averse world.

Applying Orientalism to Civil Discourse

To demonstrate why Edward Said's theory of Orientalism soundly applies to this comparative analysis, mainstream media's coverage of Ukrainian refugees compared to Arab and Middle Eastern refugees is a potent point of criticism for many Middle Eastern scholars and observers. The Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association (AMEJA) condemned the "orientalist and racist implications that any population or country is 'uncivilized' that justifies conflict as a natural expectation or condition for Syrians, Palestinians, Lebanese, and countless other "Orient" peoples (Bayoumi 2022). In this condemnation, it refers to several quotes by news correspondents, commenting on how "[Europeans] seem so like us," and that they are "Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours" (Bayoumi 2022). These notions of 'us' versus 'them' are what Said (1979) explicitly warns against throughout Orientalism. Granted, there are fundamental differences with Iraq's invasion, nevertheless, the obvious differences in the narrative are striking and undeniable. In a 2003 preface, Edward Said cites the warmongering of "screaming headlines" and books of the "Muslim menace," and the attempts to link Islam and terror in the wake of the 2003 Iraq Invasion as the "very core of traditional Orientalist dogma" (XVI). Without this 'us' versus 'them' mentality buried deep in the mindset ranging from hawkish policymakers to moderate commentators on CNN, Said argues there would be no war. In addition, his pretext links the mantra of Orientalism of American advisors in the Pentagon and White House to British, Dutch, and French imperialism; the notions, demeaning stereotypes, and similar understands of power and violence dictate American national security advisors the same way it dictated colonialism (Said 1979).

Continuing the discourse on this racial bias is the public outcry and UN acknowledgement of racism targeted at Black and Brown refugees of colour—mainly international students—during their escape from war-torn cities in Ukraine (UN News 2022). There has been evidence of flagrant abuse against people of colour and preference for White Ukrainian refugees at the border. While racism in refugee settlement is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to recognize that the narrative of the innocent, White and Christian European who is fleeing war is seen as more pressing, concerning, and "surprising" than Muslims crossing the Mediterranean, or stuck at the Belarussian-Polish border, for instance in 2021 (Mitrovica 2022; Reality Check 2021). Post-colonial theory ascertains that this is no isolated incident but is an intentional and societally driven facet of both policymakers and civilians; that the lives of those who 'look like us' are paramount to the 'others. Poiarkova (2022) uses the "otherness" (24) example to illustrate how Russia utilizes this in policy decision-making regarding Ukraine, however, it is important not to understate that this otherness feeds the perspectives towards the Middle East, rather than merely dictating them.

Applying Orientalism to Formal Discourse

Despite some indignation from Western powers, the Iraq war was nevertheless a catalyst that Orientalists latched onto under the guise of national interest strategy; that is what Edward Said warns about in a 2003 pretext in Orientalism. Arab and Muslim societies have faced "massive and calculatedly aggressive [attacks]" for their "backwardness," yet those same attackers forget that enlightenment, democracy, and Western values in general, "are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts" (Said 2003, xv). Nouri (2021) argues that the US uses this same narrative of backwardness and "abrogation of women's rights" (186) to justify "imperial expansion" (Said 2003, 14). The global response to the subsequent War on Terror's language is replete with binarism and existentialism; it is a bad ideology because it is a threat to democracy and civilization, and therefore, justifies utter war and destruction. This does not mean the binarism of 'us versus them' and the creation of others is limited to the United States. Following the 9/11 attacks, the global community, including and especially Russia, fed into the "bandwagon" of the West's narrative of Islam as an existential threat to the West, and by extension the "civilized nations" of the world (Ambrosio 2006, 1189-1190). Ambrosio (2006) argues that before Iraq, Russia self-identified as a fundamentally Western nation, with a society and history connected to the West, and goes as far as to say it is still fundamentally Western. Despite Vladimir Putin's claims of the 'us versus them' between Russia and the "collective West" (Ambrosio 2006, 1193-1194). Through their shared eyes of imperialist dogma, it is still Arabs and Middle Eastern people that are disproportionately ostracized and

dehumanized (Kaonga 2022). While neighbouring European countries accept, house, and support Ukrainian refugees, those same governments deplore, insult, and deny millions of Arab and Muslim people fleeing from war (BBC News 2021; Schmitz 2022). An article published by Deutsche Welle on the glaring disparity between "[g]ood refugee, bad refugee" (contrasting Ukrainian refugees with Afghan refugees) in Greece underscores the real implications of Orientalist influence in decision-making policy (Schmitz 2022). While the US announced it was to accept 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, millions of Latin-American refugees fleeing cartels on the Southern border are denied every year (Al Jazeera 2022a; UNHCR 2021).

Conclusion

Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations was argued to be the new reality the world will be put into during the post-Cold War era, mainly due to the shifts from an ideology-based international political system to one of two fundamentally opposing civilizations: the East and West. Huntington justifies and advocates for Western society to do everything possible to exert control over the Eastern Orient in order to secure Western values and beliefs while simultaneously civilizing the East; primarily the 'Islamic world'. This then creates a domino effect which strengthens Islamophobia in the West. Edward Said criticizes Huntington's theory and advances that the Clash of Civilizations theory is merely a construction of ideas stemming from ignorance and the view of non-Western societies as inherently backward and uncivilized. The effects of circulating ignorant thoughts stemming from ideas advanced by Huntington's theory can clearly be seen in this comparison. Orientalism is seen in the modern-day through the double standards displayed through the welcoming of Ukrainian refugees into neighbouring countries in Europe and North America that claim to have tight immigration policies such as Hungary and Poland, and through the media's depiction of Ukrainian refugees as 'people like us' while shutting out Eastern Orient refugees and depicting conflicts in their respective regions as the norm.

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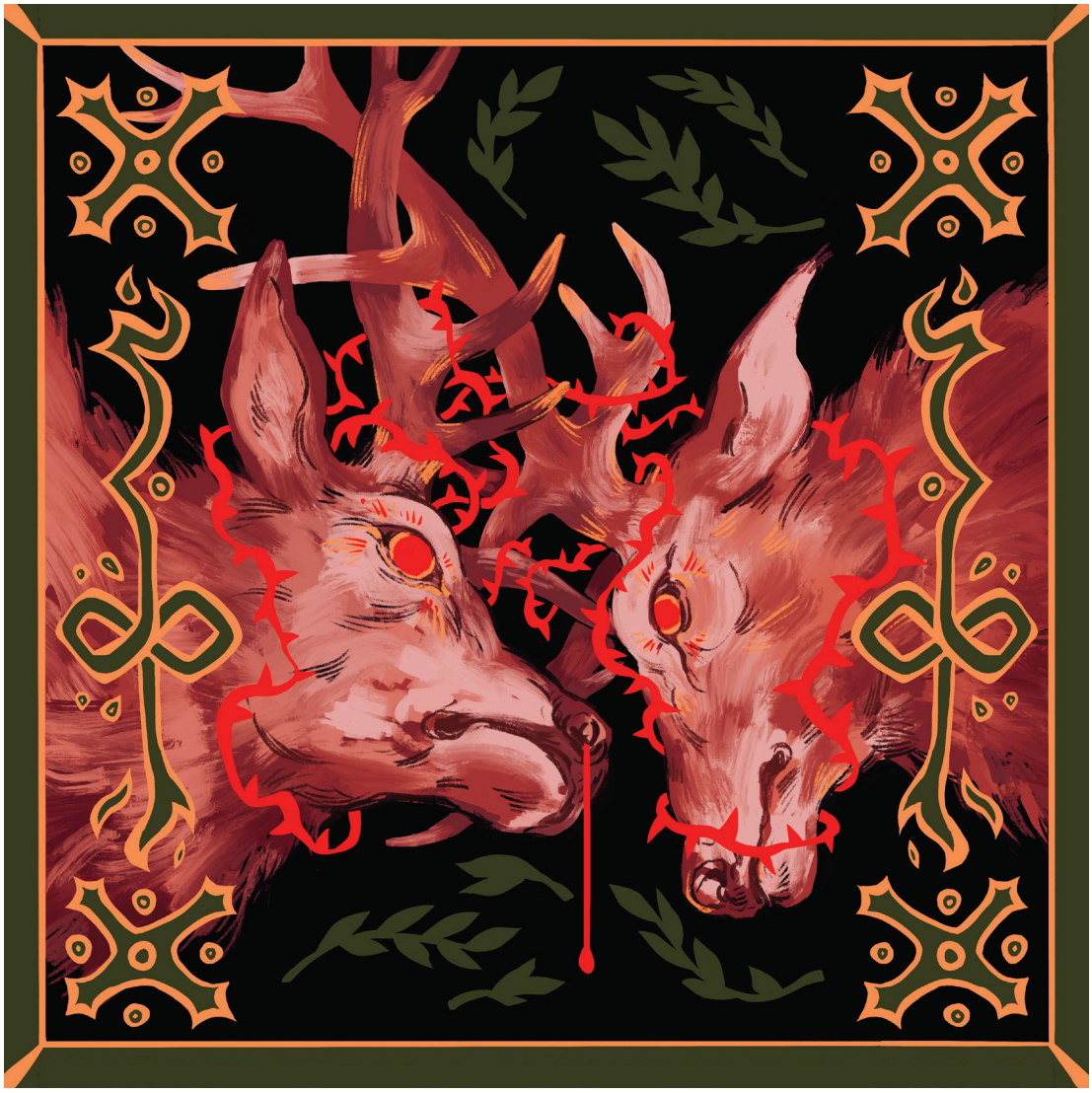

Artist: Alex Sychuk

Feminism in the Middle East:

An Analysis into Western, Islamic, and Secular Feminism

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ABSTRACT: This article showcases the diversity of feminism in the Middle East and its effects on Middle Eastern women, particularly Muslim women. I argue that though Western feminism has provided important conceptual tools for understanding and fighting patriarchal systems, it has ultimately supported the othering of Middle Eastern women. As such, Islamic feminism and secular feminism have played an important role in discrediting Western generalizations. In this paper, I first explain how the logics of Western feminism are inherently rooted in Orientalism, promoting an inaccurate and oppressive image of the Middle East. I then illustrate how Islamic feminism has been used significantly to conceptualize feminism within Islamic traditions and religious beliefs. Lastly, I showcase the prominent discourse between Islamic and secular feminism to prove movements are important to women's liberation and can benefit from joining forces.

KEYWORDS: Middle Eastern Politics, Orientalism, Liberal Feminism, Secular Feminism, Islamic Feminism

Muslim women are unfairly, yet commonly, viewed as impotent victims of their religion, culture, and society (Scharff, 2011, p. 122). This view is largely a product of the West and Western feminism. However, this perspective is being contested through the rise of both secular and Islamic feminism within the Middle East. This paper seeks to showcase how different forms of feminism have affected Middle Eastern women, with a particular focus on Muslim women. I argue that mainstream Western feminism exploits these women as it depicts them as victims of their culture to maintain Western superiority. The prominent roles of Islamic feminism and secular feminism in the Middle East discredit these Western generalizations. This paper will first explain how Western feminism is rooted in Orientalist beliefs, promoting inaccurate and oppressive representations of Muslim women and their experiences. It will then explain how Islamic feminism has been helpful in assisting Muslim women to showcase their agency while still following their religion. Lastly, it will depict the popular discourse between secular and Islamic feminism and ultimately prove that both play an important role in the fight for women's rights in the Middle East and can benefit from working together.

Western Feminism and Muslim Women

Western forms of feminism have been helpful in the fight for women's rights both in the West and, to an extent, the East. However, critiques of Western feminism regarding Muslim women in the Middle East are still valid. Western feminism promotes a very particular point of view - one that is entrenched in Orientalism and colonial beliefs. As Cyra A. Choudhury (2009) explains, Western feminism is injected with liberal beliefs and thus "subconsciously continues traditional liberal political theory's judgements about the "East" (p. 154). This also means promoting a particular view of what women's rights and women's liberation should look like (p. 154); a view that does not align with the way most Muslim women choose to live their lives.

A common debate is that of the veil or hijab. Some Western feminists see the hijab as a form of oppression and a representation of patriarchal values, and while this may be true in some cases where women are forced to wear veils according to Sharia law this is not the case for all Muslim women (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 146). Limiting the hijab to a solely oppressive symbol creates a false narrative of Islam and Muslim women. It also creates a mindset in the West that makes Muslim women out to be victims of their religion and culture who are without agency. Christina Scharff (2011) observed this in their research as female participants from Britain and Germany concluded that they viewed Muslim women as "subordinate" and "passive victims of patriarchal oppression" (p. 122). The study found that many women from Britain and Germany believed that empowered Western women did not need feminism anymore but that Muslim women from the Middle East did (p. 127). These ideas promote the belief that Muslim women do not have agency and their identity is constrained to being "veiled, exotic and oppressed by Islam" (Khan, 2005, as cited in Scharff, 2011, p. 128).

This victim identity encourages the othering of Muslims in the Middle East as it is rooted in Orientalist and colonial beliefs of Western superiority. Edward Said believed that orientalism created a distorted image of the Middle East based on the idea of Middle Eastern exceptionalism. Orientalists uphold the idea that the Middle East is uniquely uncivilized in that it cannot have modernity, democracy, and other liberal ideals; the Middle East is seen as exceptional in its resistance to modern liberal ideologies and freedoms (Said, 1979). The idea of ethnocentric epistemology is useful in this regard because it helps explain why people in the West see themselves in conflict with the Middle East. Said (1979) argues that the West and the Middle East are divided into two monolithic cultures that ignore the diversity within these places. Since the Middle East is generalized to be representative of traditional oppressive philosophy, Muslim women are seen as victims of their culture and religion in need of saving from the West. Scharff (2011) notes that "… the dichotomous construction of the free west [versus] repressive parts of the world (whose boundaries are absolute) essentializes and reifies culture as an all-determining structuring force" (p. 130). Therefore, the distorted image of the Middle East that Orientalism has created is maintained by the idea that the Middle East and Islam cannot change without the help of Western feminism. This creates only one right way to liberation. The East-West dichotomy places "the [Western] subject as the knower" and reduces Middle Eastern Muslim women to individuals that are unknowledgeable and passive (Scharff, 2011, p. 130).

The stereotypes created about the Middle East and Muslim women are thus purposely constructed to maintain Western hegemony or dominance rooted in colonial pasts. These ideas are then used to justify Western intervention, like the war on terror carried out by the United States (Mahmood, 2008). All these factors further isolate the Middle East and Muslim women.

It is important to note that though Western feminism has promoted certain oppressive images of women in the Middle East it is not inherently harmful. Western feminists have provided the terminology and theory to better understand gender oppression (Hesová, 2019). As this essay will explain later on, western feminist thought is used to an extent in Middle Eastern feminist movements.

Islamic Feminism

Though less known of it in the West, Islamic feminism is very prominent in the Middle East in the fight for women's rights. Islamic Feminism is "a feminist discourse or practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm… [and] derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an…" (Badran, 2009, as cited in Hesová, 2019, p. 30). Specifically, Islamic feminism seeks gender equality within Islam grounded in the Qur'an. An important part of Islamic feminism is engaging with religious texts in "attempts at 'rereading' and 're-appropriation'" (Hesová, 2019, p. 38). This is done to showcase and promote the "legitimacy [of gender equality] in the eyes of believers and the authorities" (p. 38). Islamic feminism works within the religious and cultural framework familiar to Muslim women. It is anti-colonial because it moves beyond the Western and liberal understandings of feminism that are often pushed onto Eastern countries. Instead, Islamic feminism introduces a unique form of feminism that works within the context of the Islamic Middle East, because, although the Middle East is religiously diverse, the vast majority of the population is Muslim and follows some version of the Qur'an. Islamic feminism enables Muslim women to re-read and reinterpret religious texts allowing them not only to change the narrative around women in their respective areas but also to express their religious and social agency.

An important concept within Islamic feminism is that of ijtihad. Ijtihad is a sort of independent reasoning which relies on thinking through the Qur'an logically and personally to re-interpret the principles beyond traditional Islamic theology (Hesová, 2019, p. 38). Specifically, ijtihad has been used to investigate the roles of men and women and how the traditional understanding of these roles in the Qur'an is "historically constructed" (Hesová, 2019, p. 39). Demonstrating that these understandings are not rigid helps promote a more egalitarian Islamic society. This is especially important because it illustrates that the religion of Islam and the cultures in the Middle East are not stagnant and do have the capability to be empowering for women without necessitating a change to fit the Western mould. Ijtihad also gives power to Muslim women as it illustrates their strength and agency within their own culture and religion: they are not victims of Islam dependent on the West. This is especially prominent when considering Rachel Rinaldo's (2014) theory of pious critical agency. Pious critical agency represents the agency of Muslim women to not only question their religion so they can promote positive change but also to choose to continue following their religion (Rinaldo, 2014, p. 829). They have found a way to follow their religion and simultaneously promote gender equality; an achievement many people in the West do not think is possible. Islamic feminists do not ignore that traditional readings of Islamic religious texts like the Qur'an are based on the male experience and rooted in a patriarchal understanding of the world (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 36); however, they also refuse the notion that their religion is inherently oppressive to women and opposed to modernity.

An interesting case of Islamic feminism in the Middle East is presented in Iran. Feminism in Iran was first constructed in a secular form, but Islamic feminism soon grew out of a need for a type of feminist activism that worked within the religious and societal system of Iran (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 34). This is partially because of the 1979 Islamic revolution that caused a rise in fundamentalism and ultimately Islamophobia (p. 34). Islamic feminists rose to the occasion in hopes to change the situation in Iran while challenging the Orientalist West's views. Iranian women have used ijtihad to rethink

gender in novel and radical interpretations. They are critical of the traditional gender roles and status women have in Iran (p. 38). Iranian Islamic feminists have also intelligently employed postmodern concepts to help them in their fight. They have borrowed the ideas of "tolerance, optimism, and the drive for self-knowledge" to promote the idea of "multiple truths, multiple roles, and multiple realities" (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 48). This encourages diversity within Islam, Muslims, and feminists. It speaks to the multiplicity of beliefs in the Middle East and Iran while also rejecting Western generalizations of the Middle East and what feminism can or should be. An important figure in Iranian feminist discourse has been Dr. Abdul Karim Soroush. Dr. Soroush has brought in two important concepts in understanding the Qur'an in a feminist light: zati and arazi. Zati includes the necessary or key components of Islam; if these were to change, Islam would no longer be Islam (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 39). Arazi, on the other hand, are components that are not essential but are instead the product of the historical time the text was written (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 39). These terms further demonstrate oppressive gender norms are a product of a specific historical time and not something inherent to Islam or its teachings.

Islamic Feminism vs Secular Feminism

It is important to note that Islamic feminism is not the only type of feminism within the Middle East. Secular forms of feminism are also prominent in the Middle East and the controversy between secular and Islamic feminism is of great importance in feminist discourses. So far, this paper has only outlined the positive views of Islamic feminism; however, secular feminists present important critiques of Islamic feminism. Many believe that Islam and feminism cannot coexist as Islam, like other religions, is intrinsically patriarchal (Ahmadi, 2006). Secular feminists differ from Islamic feminists in that they believe it is important to not create delusions about Islam and the role it may have played in the oppression of women. In the Middle East "Islamic legal institutions and practices [have played an important role] in maintaining, through the ages, the specific patriarchal order which circumscribes women's lives in Muslim countries" (Moghissi, 2002, as cited in Ahmadi, 2006, p. 35). This is one of the main reasons some feminists within the Middle East choose to be secular instead.

Secular feminism is quite different from Islamic feminism in that it focuses more on "civic equality… in politics/the political sphere, labour rights, and education [for women]" and does not focus on changing Middle Eastern theology (Hesová, 2019, p. 29). Secular feminism uses the same concepts and practices as Western feminism but without the Orientalist views that shape Western feminism. Secular feminism is just as much a product of the Middle East as Islamic feminism. Because of this, many secular feminists understand that though this form of feminism may be secular it does not need to be anti-Islamic. Many secular feminists believe in promoting women's rights and agency; this includes women having a choice in how and what religion they follow (p. 33). Hesová (2019) notes that secular activists have also helped "promote a consciousness of the diversity of Islamic law and its interpretations" (p. 35), thus helping change the narrative around Islam. Unlike what is expressed in most Western discourses, secular feminism has a long history in the Middle East that reaches back even before decolonization in some countries. For example, Egypt's secular feminism was born out of a want and need for modernization and better rights for colonized peoples (Hesová, 2019, p.30).

Secular feminism is also more inclusive than Islamic feminism since it is not restricted to a specific religion and is open to a more diverse group of women within the Middle East. However, since Islam is extremely valued in many Middle Eastern countries, secular feminism has failed in ways that Islamic feminism has succeeded. Fereshteh Ahmadi (2006) explains that secular feminists have sometimes found it challenging to provoke change "where fundamentalists hold absolute power over certain state institutions" (p. 34); meaning they have had trouble fighting oppressive gender norms from the outside. As mentioned earlier, Islamic feminists are able to work within the religious framework and thus are more likely to be successful at implementing change (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 34).

Because of the way secular feminism is organized in comparison to Islamic feminism, many people see these two as oppositional. But as Hesová (2019) explains, secular feminism and Islamic feminism can coexist in a space and complement one another (p. 33). For example, many Islamic feminists have borrowed from secular feminism to contest oppressive laws through public

activism (which is drawn from secular feminist practices). Secular feminists in the Middle East have also considered the knowledge and philosophy of Islamic feminism to help them in their own activism (p. 34). It can be said that both movements have influenced each other and are dependent on each other. Islamic feminism employs feminist concepts on gender, sexuality, and power and then applies them within their religious theology (Hesová, 2019, p. 36). This is one way in which Western and secular feminist thought have been helpful to Muslim women (p. 36). Differentiating sex from gender and understanding gender as a social concept has been an important part of feminism; one that the Islamic feminism movement could not do without. Secular feminism is also dependent on Islamic feminism to promote change in places where secular feminism does not have has much influence. This in turn makes it so Middle Eastern Islamic societies are more open to change. It is important to note that although secular and Islamic feminism are employing different tools and strategies, both are fighting for women's rights. If Islamic feminists and secular feminists worked together more often—or at least accepted how important the other's role is—they would be even more successful in their endeavours. Hesová (2019) asserts that "because of the conflation of legal and Islamic argumentation, the need for cooperation between secular and religious approaches has increased" (p. 34).

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed and explained the role different feminisms play in the Middle East. It assessed influences of three different types of feminism in the Middle East: Western feminism, Islamic feminism, and secular feminism. Western feminism has been useful in creating important concepts, like gender, that are borrowed by Islamic and secular feminists in the Middle East. However, it is also rooted in Orientalist and colonialist beliefs that deem the Middle East and Islam as inferior to the West and Western philosophy. Islamic feminism, on the other hand, is unique in that it promotes feminism within the Islamic framework and works efficiently to change gender norms from within the religion rather than disregarding the religion altogether. Lastly, secular feminism uses concepts and philosophies of Western feminism without the same negative generalizations about the Middle East. Secular feminism proves that it is just as much a part of the Middle East as Islamic feminism. Both Islamic and secular feminism have prominent roles in Middle Eastern countries and should be working together toward the shared goal of women's liberation. A concept that can be explored further is the influence both of these forms of feminism have had globally. This paper focused mainly on feminism within the Middle East, but these forms of feminism have had far reaching impacts just as Western feminism has. Islamic feminism is of particular interest because of its unique and specific take on the Qur'an. Author and historian Margot Badran (2002, as cited in Ahmadi, 2006) explains that Islamic feminism exists globally and "transcends East and West... Islamic feminism is being produced at diverse sites around the world by women inside their own countries, whether they be from countries with Muslim majorities or from old established minority communities" (p. 36). It would be fascinating to research how the Muslim diaspora including immigrants, refugees, and those who have been exiled from their countries has influenced Islamic feminism beyond the Middle East and how Islamic feminism may differ depending on where it is being practiced.

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Challenging Cultural Literary Landscapes:

Poetry as Mediation, Experience, and Myth

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ABSTRACT: "Challenging Cultural Literary Landscapes: Poetry as Mediation, Experience, and Myth" was originally written for an Italian special topics course on the experiences of Italian-Canadians. This essay covers the Italian diaspora's representation in Canadian literature with a concentration on the depiction of ethnicity, race, and culture. Specifically, it aims to examine poetry's importance to Canadian literature as a means to mediate experiences not easily conceived by prose language. This paper examines poetry by Italian Canadian writers such as Mary de Michele and Antonino Mazza and Jewish-Canadian Leonard Cohen's first collection of poetry, Let Us Compare Mythologies. It analyzes poetry's importance to self-representation and cultural exchange and the complicated networks between identity and narrative through the exploration of themes such as migration, journey, and mythology.

KEYWORDS: Literary studies, Multiculturalism, Poetry, Migration, Language, Italy, Canada, Diaspora, Culture

Word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host; that is to say, the Word Virus (the Other Half) has established itself so firmly as an accepted part of the human organism that it can now sneer at gangster viruses like smallpox and turn them in to the Pasteur Institute. But the Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself (Burroughs)

The Word virus, as introduced by William Burroughs in his essay "Ten Years and a Billion Dollars", is an alien concept that exists outside of the human subject. Burroughs postulates that language is fundamentally divisive and is part of the totalitarian human construct; infecting, replicating, and invading. It is through language that we can trace a linguistic, genealogical tradition of exchange. Like culture and ideology, William S. Burroughs' post-structuralist theory of language may assist us in understanding binarism in human tradition and the conflict that arises with the intermingling of culture, language, and experience. I will employ Burroughs' theory to discuss and disentangle the tension between language and culture in the Italian-Canadian experience. It is through Burroughs' theory of language that we can understand case studies, such as how Mary Di Michele uses art as mediation, why Leonard Cohen encourages us to compare mythologies, and why Antonino Mazza invites us to make a home in his home.

Poetics refers to both the act of creating something new like a concept, expression, or methodology. However, poetics may also mean to be used to discuss poetry, entangling the word with the duality of semiotics and literary genre. Displacement poetics refers to poetry about displacement, usually written by displaced peoples, as well as poetic treatise about displacement. Poetics has a loaded definition within the term, merging how displaced experiences constitute world-making processes. In his article on displacement poetics, "Italian Canadian as Displacement Poetics: Context, History, and Literary Production," William Anselmi writes that ethnicized Canadian literatures are written in a state of displacement, and they are "emblematic of the process of constituting a socio-cultural community within a conquered, foreign, occupied or other space" (371). He states that Italian-Canadian literature is complicated by three components:

1. Italy is the established point of origin; unstable, idealized, mythologized, and historical space.
2. Canada is used as a reference point for written comparison.
3. Italian-Canadian literature employs an imagined community, identifying "an identity of multiplicities, rather than a simple sum of the parts" (Anselmi 371).

The Italian-Canadian literary landscape is shaped by multiculturalism, the processes of displacement, and complex identities. In an analysis of Canadian multiculturalism, Caylee Hong and Renee Provost write, "in places like Canada, multiculturalism is a significant form of nationalism, not outside of it [...] multiculturalism can both enhance and hinder equality." The article posits that multiculturalism is divisive and "exacerbates conflicts between and within groups, segregating populations and hindering social and economic equality" (Hong and Provost). Multicultural Canada polarizes differences, creating fragmentation and decentralized national identity. As a result, Canadian national identity is exclusionary and privileges white, English-speaking, Anglo-Canadian voices.

The solution in a post-multiculturalist society is not ignoring differences, but acknowledging, respecting, and sharing them. Burroughs' theory argues that language is fundamentally divisive, as no one language exists to universally pertain to, represent, or seek to understand experiential realities. For Burroughs, language is a problem because it magnifies differences and creates conflict. Burroughs' solution is the cut-up theory. As Christopher Land summarizes, "cut-up is a politically radical form of writing that highlights the power relations inherent in language and the conservatism of conventional modes of both literary writing and the narrative form" (451). I propose that post-multicultural poetry functions like the cut-up theory—to disrupt linguistic barriers and explore experiential differences. This is particularly emphasized in the works from diaspora communities, such as the Jewish or Italian diasporas in Canada. Where language may fail to express the plurality of the multicultural realities, poetry is a tool for subversion against divisive linguistic institutions and the powers imbued within them.

In an article published by the Poetry Foundation, a collection of poets were asked, "Does poetry have a social function?" Stephen Burt suggests that every poet understands poetry differently, and, to every poet, poetry has a different function (297).
From this definition, we can ascertain that poetry is derived from the social 'self.' However, Burt continues that poetry is not only about the 'self,' "even though 'social,' as the antithesis of 'individual,' implies some ground of agreement, something shared" (297). Poetry then is a personal exercise that bridges individual and collective experiences. I propose that there is something in poetry for everyone, becauseeveryone reads poetry with their own life experiences as the foundation of their personal reading practices. In the same article from the Poetry Foundation, Major Jackson provides an alternative definition, stating "[t]he function of poetry is that it does not have any function beyond its own construction and being-in-the-world. For this reason, poetry makes everything (and, yes, nothing) happen" (298-299).
Poetry is a means of exchange, providing the ability to discuss and present the ideas, beliefs, and experiences of individuals and cultures that exist beyond the limit of words. Poetry not only illuminates the limitations of language but goes beyond them. By playing with language, logic, and space, poetry can say the unsayable.
Jackson continues, "Whether as a form of witness, as a medium which dignifies individual speech and thought, as a repository of our cumulative experiences, or as a space where we "purify" language, poetry, like all imaginative creations, divines the human enterprise. This is poetry's social value. (299)"

Poetry is a way to subvert language by using language, and it functions as a tool for resistance and experience. Poetry can be used to communicate what is, what isn't, and what exists beyond language. Poetry has the potential to express and understand the pluralities of human experience. Poetry acts as a mediator between what can and cannot be said. It is for this reason that poetry has innumerable importance to recording and expressing the Italian-Canadian experience.

In Mary Di Michele's poem, "Lucia's Monologue," Lucia's mother acts as a mediator between Lucia and her father. The poem reads; "I talk to mother, and she tells him what she thinks / he can stand to hear. / She's always been the mediator of our quarrels" (Di Michele 163). Lucia's mother bridges the emotional, generational, and experiential barriers between Lucia and her father. Di Michele uses the mother as a tool for understanding differences. Lucia's mother is the stand-in for the poet, as she walks with a foot in two different worlds, augmenting and mediating experience.

"Lucia's Monologue" is situated within displacement poetics as a mediation of ethnicized identities. The role of communicator is placed on the mother, as Western culture prescribes emotional expression onto women. Lucia's mother understands both Lucia's emotions and the father's logic and cultural background. The mother's mediation is a process of translation, diminution, and interpretation, wherein she repackages discourse for/about the Other. Lucia identifies that she needs to speak to her father "person to person," but "[they] don't speak the same language anymore" (Di Michele 164,165). The poem addresses that the process of reporting the Other is problematic insofar as it does not account for authentically lived experience.
"Lucia's Monologue" highlights language as divisive and sometimes detrimental to cultural mediation. As a result, the poem functions as a mediation of the author's experience, attempting to interpret and translate using poetry as a medium of exchange.

Leonard Cohen's 1956 *Let Us Compare Mythologies* is his first collection of poetry. The collection mythologizes and de-mythologizes Cohen's experience with religion and secularization as part of the Jewish diaspora in Canada. The poetry focuses on how Cohen manufactures, negotiates, and understands his identities. In his poem, "For Wilf and His House," the speaker questions his mythologized past and the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. One stanza reads:

> "Raging and weeping are left on the early road.
> Now each in his holy hill
> the glittering and hurting days are almost done.
> Then let us compare mythologies." (Cohen).

The lines comment on the difference of religions.

Cohen examines how Canada positions Christianity as the only good form religion, while all other differentiations are portrayed as "heathen[istic]" or as the villainous cultural/religious Other (Cohen). The speaker urges the addressee of the poem to consider a post-secular origin. The poem invites the reader to "compare mythologies" and imagine creation beyond divisive borders – Christian/non-Christian, Anglo/non-Anglo, us/them.

Italian Canadian displacement poetry like Antonino Mazza's "My House is in a Cosmic Ear" uses Italy as the idealized origin and Canada as the referential future. The poem uses the motif of cyclicism and mythological vision to tell a story about rebirth and migration. Mazza's poetry is a mediation of his culture and history as he mythologizes his own past. For Mazza, the poem, storytelling, and the reproduction of culture is the rebirth of himself — the cultural, historical self that is dualistically left behind in Calabria.

The poem pays homage to motherhood using water and creation imagery, evoking a return to fetal origins. For example, the clouds are "ready to burst" with the rain that runs through and shapes the landscape (Mazza 33). The cosmic house refers to his existence and the fertile, rich history of his home in Italy — the beautiful, mythologized history and culture remembered through the eyes of a child.

Mazza explicitly references Ulysses' journey in regard to his father's migration:

> "He was aboard a little purple ship, returning
> to our beautiful Calabria.
> Phoenician's and Etruscan's land, bathed
> by the sea of Ulysses" (Mazza 34).

The speaker, assumed Mazza, is Telemachus in the poem, eagerly awaiting his father's return. The comparison works so far as to mythologize Mazza's past as a place of his cultural history. The house is in a cosmic ear—the universe as ear-shaped— representing both the landscape and womb. The cosmic womb is not only his history but the reconstruction of his identity by references to a myth of creation and discovery.

> "I keep remembering this cosmic gift
> in my sleep.
> If the dream doesn't stop,
> if the word,
> if the house
> is in the word and we, by chance should meet,
> My house is your house, take it." (Mazza 34)

Mazza highlights immigration's potential as a site for exchange by exporting knowledge. The poem ends with an invitation to share culture and to understand his fellow man rather than use difference as a divisive tool against the cultural Other. Mazza's poem is an idealist take on exchange, and frames migration as a rebirth of the 'self' and of a new mythology. The poem identifies the unavoidable resurrection of creation stories as a positive reflection on the past as it is reworked for the uncertain future. Mazza's poem "My House is in a Cosmic Ear" is a cultural genealogy.

It is important that we turn to Homer as so many do when reflecting on the Western written tradition, particularly in the mind of poetry. Though not a creation story, Homer's epic poetry maps the destruction and creation of civilization in the mythical past. The Odyssey, narrated by Odysseus, tells of the end of the Trojan War as he travels through the Mediterranean. Odysseus explains the end of the war and his idea to trick the Trojans into letting the Greek soldiers into Troy. After a speech, the background minstrel sings a song for Odysseus, "taking up the tale where the Argives had embarked on their benched ships and were sailing away, after casting fire on their huts, while those others led by glorious Odysseus were now sitting in the place of assembly of the Trojans, hidden in the horse; for the Trojans had themselves dragged it to the citadel" (Hom. Od. 8.500-550).

Because it was Odysseus' idea to build the wooden horse and trick the Trojans into accepting it into the city walls as a gift, Odysseus is responsible for the destruction of a civilization. The betrayal of the gift is equally an insult to *xenia*, the idea that those who occupied your home would not cause you harm. Xenia is the foundation of a civilized and secure society, valuing trust and co-operation (Scott 17). The Greeks win the war with a betrayal of xenia, just as Paris had betrayed hospitality in Menelaus' home by stealing Helen, a violation of xenia. This is a subversion

This is a subversion of the Greek occupation of Trojan land, and an ironic, tragic ending to an entire city.

Over his 10-year journey home, Odysseus tells his story to the people he stays with, recreating civilization along the way. Homer's epic poetry maps a genealogy of civilization, both in the destruction and rebuilding of the history throughout Odysseus' journey.
As William Anselmi writes, Odysseus is transformed into an artist as his "voyage leads to a cultural paradigm shift [and] the Everyman who divests himself of his religious anchorage is the artist, the actor that begins anew civilization, creating what Nietzsche will identify as 'necessary illusions'" (374).
Odysseus uses language and storytelling to keep his personal history and the ethos of Troy alive. Odysseus becomes a mediator between the past and the present (history) and his experience in Troy and Attic Greece (experiential culture).

Anselmi suggests that the Ulyssean formulation mirrors the Italian-Canadian narrative, like many other displacement literatures. He quotes Piero Boitani, explaining that Odysseus' journey is "a mythical archetype which develops as a constant cultural logos in history and literature" (375). Anselmi suggests that "cultural logos" is significant to the critical reader because it addresses what is beyond the displacement poetics (375).

At present, multiculturalism approaches differences as performative and divisive identification of ethnic minorities. Sneja Gunew argues that diaspora and ethnic writing is a solution to the multicultural problem—"they offer a more nuanced grammar for cultural legibility within globalization" (11).
Post-multicultural writing is a future enterprise that "offers a cosmopolitan mediation and translation between the nation-state and the planetary" (Gunew 11). Post-multicultural poetry embodies and celebrates the transnational multiplicity of identities rather than focusing on the integration of 'all' into a monolithic same-ness.

Mary Di Michele's "Lucia's Monologue" highlights the difficulties of communication and mediation of experience between cultural generations.
Di Michele approaches the poem as the solution.
Leonard Cohen's work questions the cultural-religious sphere in the face of marginalization and the past.
Antonino Mazza presents language as a tool to overcome the problems of the way we build up binaries and marginalize people based on difference.
Mazza's epistemological approach to Western civilization uses writing as a site for exchange of culture and knowledge. The poems highlight the importance of poetry as resistance and possibilities for diaspora and multicultural realities. Poetry often speaks between worlds and words, using space and the non-verbal to communicate experience. Although, it is difficult to challenge a methodology while working within it.

Author Jeanette Winterson wrote a retelling of the myth of Atlas called Weight. Winterson reimagines Atlas' story to examine how Atlas may have understood his identity and responsibility in relation to his existence in the universe. Weight uses poetic storytelling to explore what it means to exist in differences, as Winterson's Atlas embodies the Other who is punished and lives outside of the world. The story begins and ends with the chapter "I want to tell the story again" (Winterson).
She writes that myths are important because of their universality — myths are about simultaneous 'being' and 'becoming,' and are ultimately about what it means to be human (Winterson).

"What is it that you contain? The dead. Time. Light patterns of millennia opening in your
gut. Every minute, in each of you, a few million potassium atoms succumb to radioactive
decay. The energy that powers these tiny atomic events has been locked inside potassium
atoms ever since a star-sized bomb exploded nothing into being. Potassium, like uranium
and radium, is a long-lived radioactive nuclear waste of the supernova bang that accounts
for you.
Your first parent was a star" (Winterson).

In Weight, Atlas eventually gets to choose to live differently from his original fate to hold up the earth for eternity. Atlas chooses to let go, to embrace a different future elsewhere. As Winterson illustrates, mythology has the potential to tell the foundations of a people's beliefs and history—what they value, and how they conceive themselves as a people.
Weight highlights that the story has power to express and

redefine the present in context of the past.
The story exemplifies the transformation of myth, offering a way to contextualize what it is to share and to be human from her experiences. Although Weight is successful in reimagining personhood in the cosmic, ancient past, the storytelling is limited to the prosaic genre, and is unable to work beyond the writing conventions. The story is only able to convey the dimensions of Atlas' personhood within the context of one culture, one language, and origin.

Poetry is essential to recording the histories and experiences that escape the grasp of prose. As prose so often leaves very little room for contradiction and plurality, instead poetry is the tool and the solution. Poetry has the power to use language and story to subvert and reinvent, mediating the past/present and the distance sometimes created between places and people. Poetry can be a form of resistance for Italian-Canadian poets like Antonino Mazza and Mary di Michele, as well as for other diaspora writers like Leonard Cohen. For these poets, poetry is an addition and transfiguration of their mythos; it is a return and a new beginning that reconciles the struggles of migration, multiplicity, and belonging. Afterall, what are we all but our own encapsulated universes and stories.
We are different cultures, languages, and poetry,
so, please, come and make a home in my home.
Let us compare mythologies.

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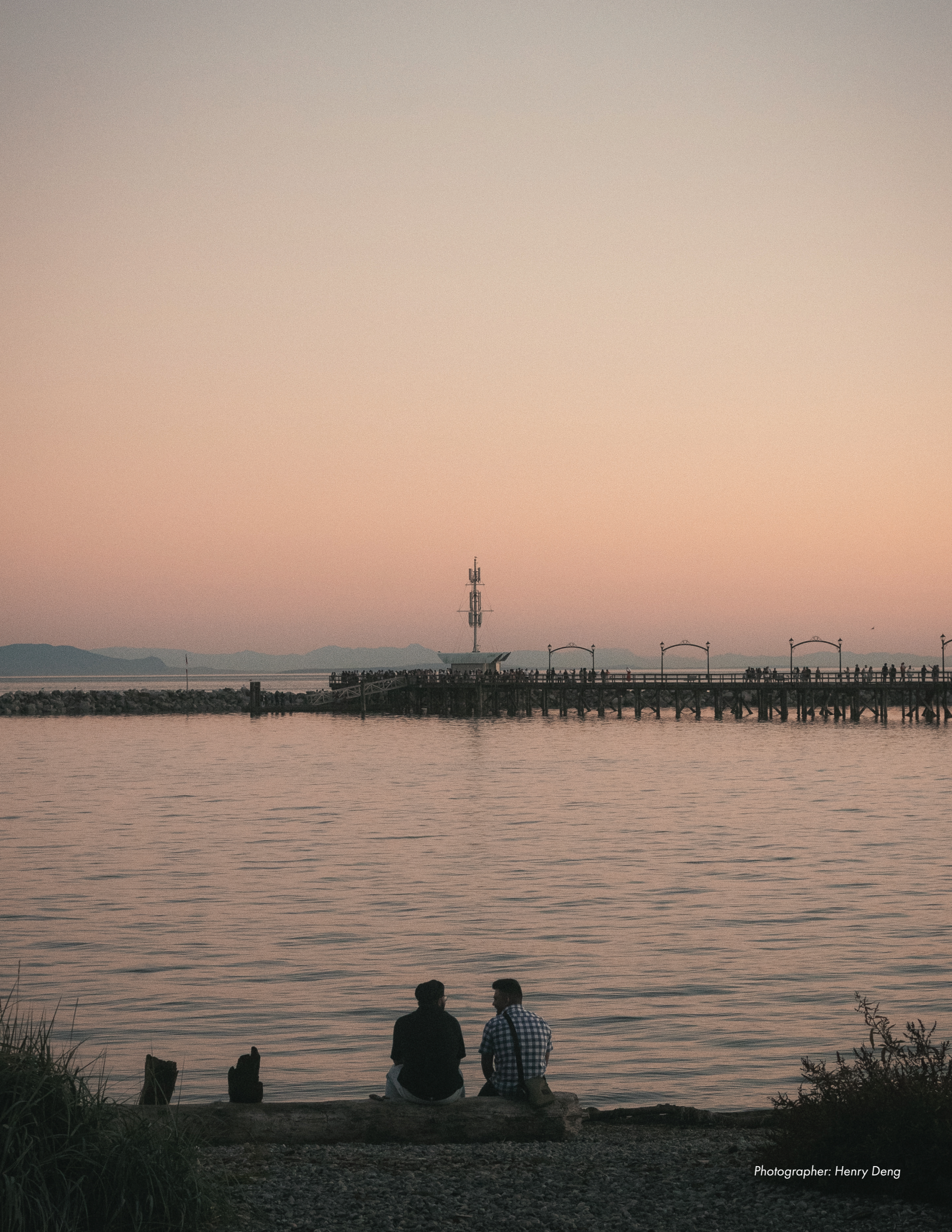

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The Paradoxes of Human Rights

An analysis of the contradictions of human rights through Robert Meister, Costas Douzinas, and Hannah Arendt

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines mainstream human rights discourse and its failure in being upheld within society. The paper is analyzed through prominent political philosophers like Robert Meister, Costas Douzinas, and Hannah Arendt but with a greater emphasis on Meister's phenomena of Transitional Justice. This paper is divided into four sections where each political thinker provides their skepticism on human rights and ends off with its broader implication through current movements like Black Lives Matter.

KEYWORDS: United States, Counterterrorism, Transitional Justice, Black Lives Matter, Human Rights Discourse, Truth and Reconciliation

Human rights discourse is understood as basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. Human rights are universal and inalienable in the sense that it goes beyond confined borders and is directly related to global citizenship, for we have a collective responsibility to uphold these inherent rights. Morality becomes the center of the matter where the principle of sameness dictates that political interests cannot transcend or compete with the rights that belong to all of us at the most natural level. This human rights discourse is affirmed through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which sets out the framework of our fundamental rights. Despite the language of human rights being ubiquitous, there is an array of issues affecting our world today that result in unfortunate events such as war, famines, and genocides. Many of these events are caused by various actors and governments who fail to uphold these "inherent rights". Political philosopher Robert Meister provides one of the best identified problems of human rights discourses, where he argues for a renewal of the politics of victim and beneficiary that avoids moral pitfalls of the revolutionary project (Meister 2011). Meister describes this phenomenon as "transitional justice". He challenges this mainstream human rights discourse from a perspective that calls out its failure to focus on the prevention of structural violence and social deprivation. This paper will also explore the similarities that philosophers Hannah Arendt and Costas Douzinas share with Meister on the vague language of human rights and how it is inseparable from politics and contradictory to the nature of humankind.

Meister and transitional justice

In After Evil, political philosopher Robert Meister depicts the mainstream human rights discourse as a counterrevolutionary project that works against an alternative and instead encompasses unjust economic, social, and political systems through revolutionary means (Meister 2011). He distinguishes three categories of actors in contemporary human rights discourse: perpetrators, victims, and beneficiaries. The perpetrators are responsible for committing evils in the past, while the victims are subjects of those evils that still suffer from the effects of past evils (Meister 2011). He distinguishes three categories of actors in contemporary human rights discourse: perpetrators, victims, and beneficiaries. The perpetrators are responsible for committing evils in the past, while the victims are subjects of those evils that still suffer from the effects of past evils (Meister 2011). Then there are the beneficiaries of past evils in the present day. Meister argues that this human rights discourse avoids addressing the structural relations of the victim and beneficiary but instead excuses the "general exoneration of all non-perpetrators"(Meister, 2011, 26), blurring moral distinctions between passively supporting subjects of past regimes and the current beneficiaries and supporters of reconstituted societies (Meister 2011). This means that while most perpetrators of violence and cruelty end up facing punishment, the individuals and communities that uphold the existing order are redeemed and their roles as counterrevolutionary saviours is confirmed in human rights practice. Meister explains that an "underlying hope of today's human rights discourse is that victims of past evil will not struggle against its ongoing beneficiaries after the evildoers are gone" (Meister 2011, 8). The problem with this "hope" is that beneficiaries of oppression fail to be implicated in the contemporary human rights paradigm and the lack of such recognition cannot foster an attainment of real justice or human rights in response to such oppressive systems. Simply put, as long as structural inequalities remain in place then evil is inevitable and obtaining true justice is out of reach. Meister similarly questions the validity of the rigid demarcation of the lines between evil and justice.

Within this human rights paradigm there are specific actors that play a role in driving this flawed historic conception. According to Meister, the agents of contemporary human rights paradigm are governments or international organizations like the United Nations (UN), who work in the name of intervention to protect and provide relief to victims of political violence. However, Meister calls out these agents as the revolutionaries who "no longer are the standard paradigm of a militant for human rights" (Meister 2011, 20). He goes on to say that their "willingness to inflict suffering on enemies raises too many questions about politically motivated cruelty" (Meister 2011, 20). These so-called "militants for human rights" have become the paradigmatic violators of human rights, rather than fighters for human rights. This critique of human rights discourse can be analyzed in the pursuit of what Meister describes as "transitional justice" (Meister 2011).

The mechanism of transitional justice has been used to respond to widespread violations of human rights where victims are recognized and the emphasis for peace and reconciliation is promoted after a period of the violations. It puts the need for wounded nations to reckon with the past in order to build a better future.

A prime example of this mechanism is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The establishment of this commission sought to provide moral victory for victims of the apartheid who experienced human rights abuses under racial segregation. It provided a sense of closure to beneficiaries per order of the post-apartheid state. The problem, however, was the lack of involvement in addressing social and economic transformation. The commission had the power to grant amnesty to the beneficiaries but did not implement reparations which left an "unjust and inequitable social and economic system intact" (Mamdani 2002, 34). Another example is Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was meant for the Canadian government to promote truth, peace, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This was following former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Indian Residential Schools' settlement agreement back in 2006. The problem with the TRC is that none of the tangible actions being requested from the Indigenous communities were ever fulfilled, limiting the Canadian government from upholding accountability. The government has continually attempted to use apologies instead to narrow the scope of government obligation and to shut down other Indigenous demands. The Canadian government has concurrently taken a neoliberal approach where Indigenous peoples are dispossessed of their lands for resource exploitation and corporate interests (Bean 2022). Many Indigenous communities still don't have access to clean drinking water, which is a direct violation of human rights.

Such a transitional justice framework addresses only a discrete segment of the historical injustices that have structured relations between states and its oppressed people. Every truth commission must determine how to dispense with individual perpetrators of the historical crimes under discussion, yet much of this hinges on the balance that is struck between truth, justice, and reconciliation. But this transitional justice framework shows a complete lack of effort since it forces victims of past abuses to claim as if they have not been "morally damaged" by reassuring continuing beneficiaries of evil that they will not be treated as perpetrators now. It is a one-sided deal that serves to protect the oppressor and colonial institutions, which in this case is the criminal "justice" system. Human rights movement as a result aims to persuade the passive supporters of the old order to "abjure illegitimate means of counterrevolutionary politics" which are "repressive and fraudulent techniques of power" (Meister 2011, 24). Meister argues that today "the invocation of human rights is often part of a political project fundamentally at odds with the revolutionary struggles based on human rights" (Meister 2011, 7). In other words, this has become the war cry of a self-described 'international community', many whom come from the West.

Human rights in its liberal context is meant to limit the promise of justice. Primarily because past horrors of the twentieth century urge us to consider that a promise like this would come at too high of a cost. Post-Cold War powers are additionally opposed to this promise of justice involving greater political and social equality. We are engaging in a language of human rights that justifies the hegemony of a system of global capitalism which actively serves to undermine the attainment of such "universal human rights." This has provided us with a limited and problematic response to the phenomenon of political evils concerning colonialism, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. Liberal human rights are presented as a higher politics premised on the transcendence of vulgar politics through ethics. However, if we avoid the need in making revolutionary changes in fear that it might upset power structures, then this will constrain us to a neoliberal framework of human rights. The limits of this framework reinforce the nationalist structure of state authority in contemporary world politics, which is tied to the logic of both colonialism and genocide. Liberal human rights could outright oppose genocide, but this is not the case since the national and statist order are what makes it possible.

Douzinas on the paradoxes of human rights

Costas Douzinas is another political philosopher who, like Meister, questions this idea of human rights. This concept of human rights holds the promise of a world where individuals and groups are no longer oppressed, dominated or degraded. Yet, Douzinas warns us to be wary of this uncritical acceptance of human rights

discourse. He states that rights have turned into "tools of public power and individual desire" (Douzinas 2007, 8). Rights in the hands of the state can become enacted in a way that could easily be wielded in the name of state power or in the name of protecting national interests. States can protect rights but in doing so it may not be doing anything particularly just, because rights are essentially about what is owed, and the decision taken in certain hands on what is owed can be someone's view of what they personally believe is to be owed. Human rights dressed up in this moral political language makes it politically legitimate. Douzinas points out from a historical and genealogical perspective that such rights have been "colonized" to the extent that they have lost their critical edge. He states that "every time a poor, oppressed or tortured person uses the language of rights, to either protest or fight, they draw from and connect with the most honorable metaphysics, morality and politics of the Western world" (Douzinas 2007, 33). This rhetoric of human rights has therefore been ingrained in our institutions which have insured against challenge and no longer serve the purpose of defending the most vulnerable – those who are the poor and marginalized – from oppressive powers. In other words, human rights have only paradoxes to offer.

Douzinas makes a connection to Meister in that both believe mainstream human rights discourse is based on the premise that politically motivated violence against innocent people is always wrong. The responsibility to protect on the part of an ill-defined international community is called by global norms in the name of "humanitarian intervention." All while suggesting that prohibitions against the use of politically motivated physical violence are excused when such violence is committed by the international community in the name of global human rights. Both scholars expose the revolting underbelly of Western "civilization" like the United States "military humanism" (Douzinas 2007, 7). Much of it derives from the geopolitical rivalry leading to the war in Afghanistan. This planted the seeds of terrorist movements that eventually reached out to Western nations like the infamous 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

We later see how the Bush administration took swift action and declared a "war on terror" which led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Such interventions in the Middle East are quite evidently predicated on colonial logics in a decolonizing world. Much of what happens within states like Iraq and Afghanistan are rendered unimportant and are couched in the language of the "mission civilisatrice" or, more implicitly, the "white man's burden" (Douzinas 2007). This is rationalized as largely benign placing it outside the remit of disciplinary international relations. Douzinas points out the obvious that if "the less civilised do not accept our charity, we will have to impose it on them with fighter bombs and tanks" this is a loud and clear proclamation of "just wars" (Douzinas 2007, 80). As a result, the moralization and politicization of human rights in international law have become a form of global currency, which creates an imaginary and unattainable utopian world that has become a justification for force and hegemony.

Arendt and the contradiction of universal rights

Arendt's Decline of Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man analyzes the state of European politics post-WWII as a case study of human rights. Arendt describes the United Nation Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as embodying a contradiction (Arendt 1973). Since the declaration requires states to protect the "universal" and "inalienable" rights of all human beings, the emergence of the new "figure" or "group" known as the stateless are excluded and denied these rights (Arendt 1973,365). Arendt uses the example of Jews and the Heimatlosen, a group of stateless people in Europe where she explains that the emergence of such statelessness was due to the "the nation state" being established as a unit of political organization (Arendt 1973, 363). Therefore, these "human rights" were not guaranteed to the stateless since they had to not only be a person but also a citizen. Natural rights designated what is right and due to each according to one's nature, but nature is also divided into a "universal component" that belongs in theory to all members of the "species human" and is given only to the "citizens of the state" (Arendt 1973). The contradiction of the UDHR is something that Meister, Arendt, and Douzinas all share in regard to how this assumption of human rights discourse and its "universal language" is dangerous. Mainly because the more a nation expands its declaration of human rights, the more it opens up space for power to be used in total contradiction to peace, freedom of speech, and everything western society recognizes as a fundamental human right.

A lot of this is replicated in the United Nations (UN) and its bodies in human rights structures and security councils. Its spectrum of members shift from countries deemed to be totalitarian to what western society perceives as democracies. Saudi Arabia, a radical Islamic country that tortures political rights activists and represses women of their rights, sits on the human rights council and is able to have the right to vote and participate in fundamental decisions regarding the UN. The United States sits on both councils and is able to make laws while judging their own actions of human rights violations, like invasion wars. This gives them the advantage to avoid social responsibility and justify their actions through "just war" narratives. This further supports the question of "who is really defining what fundamental human rights are?" The UN has become a western instrument dispensing neo-colonial justice. To Arendt's point, statehood and sovereignty today result in nationalism and its consequences transform the state from an "instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation" (Arendt 1973, 275). National interest has priority over law leading to genocides and civil wars. Douzinas similarly describes that the real recipients of such rights are members of the newly emerging nation-states, not the refugees or stateless. The modern subject reaches his "humanity by acquiring political rights of citizenship" (Douzinas 2007, 98); all rights, morals and principles are aligned to cultural perceptions and the country which defines them. They are neither universal nor protected to any further extension of the borders of a nation. If the international community, being the UN, continues to give corrupt member countries (i.e. Saudi Arabia, US etc.) a platform to speak without disciplinary action, then it only provides more state power, which, once again, contributes to the issue in tackling human rights abuses within such countries and beyond.

Broader implications of human rights

In many Western societies, we think we have a good approach to basic human rights such as freedom of speech, right to religion, and liberty. We then distance ourselves from the suffering of so-called "Others" and claim the moral high ground as self-proclaimed saviours of the world. Yet, we are making a lot of profit with the lack of basic human rights in different countries especially through wars and child labour. The morality and the values we might apply within our borders are easily pushed aside for this, lack of commitment to these basic rights. We see this with the US selling weapons of war to countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; both dictatorships and the US enables them to commit war crimes in Yemen. Even the US and Canada's involvement of indulging in fast fashion where many clothing brands partake in child labour. In the context of minorities, they might be judicially a member of a certain country like Canada or the US, but they will never be treated equally, which has propelled movements like Black Lives Matter and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

Conclusion

Despite living in a post-colonial world, human rights act as the redemption of the civilizing mission, coming after the evils of colonialism and genocide have been repudiated and punished. Yet they are unable to offer any grander account of justice or fixture to a political system that is broken and rooted in colonial politics. Hence, the mainstream version of human rights and its flawed moral logic of "never again" now assumes that the international community should intervene when it can to prevent the repetition of undeniable evils in the twenty-first century that it failed to prevent in the twentieth. However, such human rights discourse is contradictory to the nature of humankind. If we continue to think within the context of borders, this only aggravates the application of "universal human rights." The common saying "justice delayed is justice denied" is quite evident in this case given the fact that human beings use human rights to feel superior or justify their actions when committing crimes against humanity.

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