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'Whiteness' vs 'Otherness': A Conceptualization of Race Through an Affective Lens

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Abstract:
Feelings and emotions are an intrinsic part of our everyday life and racialized bodies experience them profoundly and continuously. Through the skin and through the senses, race evokes an affective response. From anger to sadness, fear, and shame for both the dominant culture and the racialized minority, affect has shaped their interactions, dynamics, and relationships. Today, the separation between 'us' and 'the other' is still palpable within the context of social and political life. By understanding how bodies become racialized, the role of the skin as a visual representation of difference, the duality of melancholia and the concept of disidentification against dominant ideologies, this paper aims to demonstrate that affect and race are constitutive of each other. When looking at racial history through an affective lens, we see that it has been bound by emotions that happen in our daily existence; in instances, moments and encounters that leave a somehow permanent mark. Affect flows and gets stuck, it reveals stories of happiness and stories of trauma. It discloses other ways of knowing and other ways of learning. It helps us look at the past, dwell and learn from it to open new pathways in the lives of marginalized communities. It calls for an urgency to express unconformity toward racial formations and to understand how emotions circulate and move through our own bodies and through the world.

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Introduction

When we think about race and affect, it is difficult to see them as separate concepts due to the systematic exclusion and 'othering' that bring moments of alienation, anger, and melancholia to racialized minorities. Categorizing individuals and bringing meaning to the perceived differences between 'us' and 'the other' reinforce power dynamics and hierarchies when we think about the circulation of emotions where 'the other' transforms into a racialized subject. Sarah Ahmed (2004) understands that "the politics of racial hatred involves attributing racial others with meaning, a process we can describe as 'the making of unlikeness'" (p. 55) and because of this, the everyday encounters we have with 'others' create social and bodily spaces wherein we move, we touch, and we are affected. Understanding emotions as investments in cultural standards and not as mere psychological traits is important to comprehend how racialization is affective from the moment we separate bodies that can be 'loved' from those that can be 'hated' (Ahmed, 2004). Taking into consideration these ordinary encounters with 'strange' bodies, the concealment and intricacy of skin, the melancholic subject, and the performance of disidentifications to resist white supremacy, I argue that to fully understand race transgression and minority representation we need to look at them through an affective lens, as it is through affect that the interactions, dynamics, and relationships between racialized minorities and dominant ideologies are shaped and lived.

Racialization and Affect

Regarding the complex interplay between racial identity and affective experience, Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) explains how racialization in America attempted to produce an ideal of a white, dominant subject that is considered superior because of such exclusion and isolation of racialized others, which can help us understand how race is experienced and embodied. For her, one of the elements that deserves more attention is the fact that the narrative of liberty that the United States bases its cultural memory on contradicts its history of exclusion, imperialism, and colonization. Finding an answer to how the nation "goes on" while acknowledging past wrongdoings, burdens of discrimination, and revulsion in the pursuit of progress and the construction of an American identity is difficult to answer within our current panorama (Cheng, 2001). Cheng also recalls how "for a child coming to racial discrimination, affective formation and distinction (how one tells the difference between love and hate) become so entangled and twisted that love and hate both come to be 'fabricated' and 'fraudulent'" (p. 17). This aligns with Ahmed's (2004) idea

that when we align ourselves with some others, we are consequently aligning ourselves against 'other' others.

There is also a recurring theme of discussions about racialization that revolves around the skin. In *Black, White, and in Color,* Hortense Spillers (2003) remarks that skin colour conveys the most visual and 'obvious' perception of the racialized subject as a 'foreign' individual and how dominant practices turn to be irrational when we consider the flesh as a source for 'difference'. Within the same narrative, Michelle Stephens (2014) recalls that "black skin and the white gaze were the two opposing sides of this difference mask" (p. 114) which brings ideas about the attachment skin and colour have in the understanding of race from the beginning. How these ideas are intrinsically linked to the legacy of colonization that contemplates the permeability of the skin and the distinction between similarities and differences that attend to racial studies will be mentioned throughout this paper – to understand the connection between bodily encounters, racial melancholia, inscrutability, and performing disidentifications.

Body Encounters in the Ordinary

To think about the body as the structure for racialization is to comprehend how this process is socially constructed and circulated. This raises questions about how bodies become marked with differences and can make us wonder if embodiment transforms into a site of differentiation instead of one of inclusion by understanding 'my body' and 'the other's body' as a relationship of "asymmetry and potential violence" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 48). By examining a 'strange body' not only as a physical object out of place, but as a metaphor for how 'other bodies' are perceived as strange, inadequate, or nonconforming with certain dominant social forms, these bodies may be racialized or excluded from cultural normativity. Ahmed (2000) considers that these 'strangers' may not be really strangers but someone we already know: "The stranger comes to be faced as a form of recognition: we recognize somebody *as a stranger*, rather than simply failing to recognize them" (p. 21). This moment of 'lack of recognition' turns our attention towards hated bodies, towards the idea that the accumulation of affective value circulates between signifiers when thinking about relationships with the 'other' and how negative feelings of reluctance are involved and come through as intense emotions. When "the ordinary becomes that which is already under threat by the imagined others whose proximity becomes a crime against person as well as place" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 43) the 'strange bodies' are

exploited as tools to reinforce power structures that contribute to the production and perpetuation of alterity and (in)difference.

Kathleen Stewart's (2007) conception of 'ordinary affects' as "the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected" (pp. 1-2) highlights the importance of said encounters with a racialized 'other' in everyday life, as it is "through affective encounters that objects and others are perceived as having attributes, which 'gives' the subject an identity that is apart from others" (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 52-53). This ongoing flow of interactions and scenarios that could happen when we cross the street or enter a coffee shop, generate attachments that can either bring people together or keep them apart. The pull of ordinary affects is such, that even when it stalls or fails, we still feel it (Stewart, 2007). These ordinary encounters can transform into 'racial' encounters when the subject adopts a physical form and becomes discernible from others. Recognizing and embodying strangers involve a variety of 'unknown' feelings when identifying those strangers as 'bodies out of place': "Cultural difference exacerbates feelings of danger. Encounters with culturally alien people are defined by anxiety and uncertainty, which inhibits social interaction and reinforces social boundaries" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 36). Here, encounters and re-encounters relate to the intensity and vibratory motion of Stewart's (2007) concept of *still life* and how "a quivering in the stability of a category or a trajectory, gives the ordinary the charge of an unfolding" (p. 19). The racialization of bodies is an affective (re)action, it is orienting ourselves away or towards the other and leaving lasting impressions. Further, Ahmed (2000) asks: "How do 'bodies' become marked by differences? How do bodies come to be lived precisely through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby the differences in other bodies make a difference to such lived embodiment?" (p. 42). With this, she expands the concepts surrounding racialized bodies to emphasize how the skin functions as a barrier that converts 'white', 'brown', and 'black' into physical 'differentiation' and helps us connect corporeal sensations with both, the actual physical bodies and affective sensations.

The Inscrutability of Skin

Examining the affectability of racialized bodies and drawing from critical race studies and psychoanalysis, Stephens (2014) emphasizes that the skin serves "as a threshold, a point of contact, a site of intersubjective encounter, between the inner and outer self and between the self and the other" (pp. 2-3). Therefore, racial differences are marked by cultural meaning and social negotiations and 'bodies with skin' are seen as sites of difference that become targets of a "racializing discursive

order" (p. 3). This connects to Ahmed's idea (2000) of how meaning gets stuck to bodies as it circulates between people: "The skin allows us to consider how boundary-formation, the marking out of the lines of a body, involves an affectivity which already crosses the line. For if the skin is a border, then it is *a border that feels*" (p. 45). The skin becomes a place full of affect.

Stephens (2014) points out how the most apparent 'differences' in the stranger (or foreigner) are "perceived in skin colour" (p. 6) which, in its essence, is linked to the understanding of race in the nineteenth century. She observes that while during this era the skin was seen as merely an object of the gaze, in our contemporary life we pay more attention to the skin as a vehicle for interaction, conflict and affective knowledge that aligns seamlessly with how "the re-forming of bodily and social space involves a process of *making the skin crawl*; the threat posed by the bodies of others to bodily and social integrity is registered on the skin" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 54). Spillers (2003) also expands upon these physical attributes by identifying skin colour as "the most easily remarkable and irremediable difference" (p. 211) between 'foreign bodies' that drag a history of violence and degradation. Thinking about skin in relation to racial differences and affect comes with a continuous dichotomy between the permeability and impermeability of bodies within a predominantly white discourse: "The skin, thickened into visibility with its racialized meaning as a sign of human difference, requires […] the extraction of a part of the human body from the corporeal to give it a meaning in the mirror of the gaze that is separate from oneself" (Stephens, 2014, p. 197). This projects into the skin identity and subjectivity that becomes, as Vivian Huang (2022) conceptualized, inscrutable; revealing certain aspects while still concealing others to understand that "being is never exactly being alone; it is always a withholding" (p. 184). The skin becomes a medium to reflect upon the visible and hidden aspects of the embodied experience of race and a perceptible representation of how ordinary affects acquire richness and complexity in surfaces and textures (Stewart, 2007) that are intimately linked with ordinary and melancholic encounters.

The Duality of Racial Melancholia

It is from trauma across minority communities and people that we can now talk about racial melancholia as "the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (Cheng, 2001, p. 10) that is a consequence of the dominant, standard, white national ideal. Spillers (2003) dismantles the binary opposition between 'blackness' and 'whiteness' and explains how they are mutually constituted within a larger system of

racial domination. She highlights the way in which the narrative of the American race is fraught with inconsistency because its sets of beliefs have been forced to distort reality and function in opposition to a visibly diverse and mixed social structure, which is progressively faltering concerning 'matters of race'. As a result, this becomes a crucial element for understanding the affective aspect of racialization when we turn our gaze to the melancholia linked to this separation between 'us' and 'the other'.

In *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng (2001) delves into the complex relationship between race, identity, and melancholia in contemporary society, demonstrating that the impact of racial trauma creates individual and collective consciousness. She emphasizes that enduring legacies of oppression, discrimination, and violence have brought sadness, loss, and longing that are not only the product of past wounds, but of a process of racialization that marks the lived experiences of marginalized groups in the face of the eternal presence of 'whites'. Segregation and migratory difficulties are all part of America's racialization history; but it is the body, the skin, and the everyday encounters that shape a sense of displacement between strangers. Cheng further explains that "the separation between the 'white' and 'the other', generates a feeling of inferiority that may affect hearts and minds" (p. 4) and when reading this quote in the context of everyday life we may notice the complications surrounding 'racial injury' while highlighting the resilient capacity of minorities in the face of discrimination. 'We', 'they', 'the others' are still here. Drawing from Sigmund Freud's concept of mourning as "a healthy response to loss" (p. 7), Cheng delves into what it means to be melancholic when the subject is not capable of getting rid of that loss and becomes entangled with it. When the object of love or nostalgia transforms into one of resentment, the melancholic becomes 'stuck'.

By understanding racial identification as a melancholic act itself, Cheng (2001) argues that in a way, the dominant culture 'suffers' from racial melancholia due to the complex relation to 'other' racialized bodies and "the nexus of investment and anxiety provoked by slavery and other institutions of discrimination" (p. 12). In this way, melancholia serves as an instrument to explain both the acknowledgement and evasion of guilt of racial prejudice and to connect the melancholic subject to an identity that according to José Esteban Muñoz (1999) is easily accessed by the majoritarian subjects as there is no need for them to "activate their own senses of self" (p. 5). Cheng speaks about an uncomfortable feeling when talking about this duality of melancholia for the dominant subject, but she also calls for an imperativeness to start looking "at the historical, cultural, and cross-racial consequences of racial wounding and to situate these effects as crucial, formative elements of individual, national, and cultural identities" (pp. 19-20). All the loss, mourning, and fatigue that come with racial melancholia is well-founded after years

of neglect and indifference, but history has also shown that these emotions can spark something different in racialized minorities – a need to disidentify with normativity and injustice, to create art, to dance, to be loud, and to be proud, to write and to feel too much, to be very much alive.

Disidentifying with Normativity

Vivian Huang's (2022) idea about how to combat practices of white supremacy and the tensions of racial experience through forms of "doing, knowing, and being that are inaccessible from an outside perspective" (p.3) allows spaces of agency to be created among people of colour in white-dominant spaces employing artistic experiences and encounters. The concept of inscrutability is then an "alternative world-making imagined, materialized and made shareable through minoritarian aesthetic encounters" (pp. 22-23). When referring to these bodily places, Huang and Muñoz (1999) draw from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 'practices of reparative knowing' to learn how to navigate through racial melancholia and understand the breadth of the concept – expanding beyond a superficial representation of sadness, shaping the multiple processes of (dis)identification of minoritized communities and their new ways of seeing the world. Similarly, Ahmed (2004) emphasizes that it is through moments and experiences that racialized subjects identify or disidentify with one another, generating a division between likeness and unlikeness. The way in which one knows and interacts with 'the other' is what creates a sense of belonging or alienation; although it brings with it stories of racism and 'whiteness', it is more latent from the moment of said encounter (Muñoz, 2006). As Huang recalls, over time, American and Western discourses have shown anxiety and distrust towards the quiet and the unseen. Therefore, over the years, racializing affects have revealed new ways of living, where minoritarian subjects "exist and create lifeworlds and histories in excess of their identification" (Huang, 2022, p. 186).

When we talk about identity, we perceive how mixed races have been left aside throughout history (Cheng, 2001) because they provoked "a misnamed anxiety" to the dominant culture and damaged the "pedigree of racial origin" (Spillers, 2003, p. 27). For Muñoz (2006) brownness "is a mode of attentiveness to the self for others that is cognizant of the way in which it is not and can never be whiteness" (p. 680) and with that, a conversation of survival and desire is started, using the concept of 'disidentification' to craft an idea of "identities-in-difference" to name minoritarian subjects (Muñoz, 1999, p. 7). Disidentifications in this context, involve racialized bodies that create strategies to work against the reduction of race and identity to the

"lowest-common-denominator terms" (Muñoz, 1997, p. 6). Considering Michel Foucault's 'polyvalence of discourse', Muñoz expands on how disidentification becomes a tool of resistance to power as a fixed discourse. In *Feeling Brown, Feeling Down* (2006), he uses the work of legendary Chicana artist Nao Bustamante to tell a story about the challenges associated with finding a sense of belonging in alterity through a 'depressive position' that comes when people of colour feel a sense of discomfort within the expected standards of emotions and behaviour dictated by societal norms, particularly when it comes to the disjunction of 'whiteness' and 'blackness'. In racial performativity, affect becomes a path through which we perceive one another, and it shows the wavelengths through which marginalized voices are expressed, perceived, and embodied. Ultimately, performance involves bodies; and with the displacement and attentiveness of the self to others, we are reminded of that (Spillers, 2003; Muñoz, 1999).

Read as an answer for the conception of 'feeling brown' as "a doing within the social that surpasses limitations of epistemological renderings of race" (Muñoz, 2006, p. 687), both Huang (2022) and Muñoz (1999) find in the act of performing an avenue for minoritized communities to express a discomfort against normative establishments and use it as a response to subvert the constraints imposed by dominant power structures. Stewart (2007) explains how ordinary affects can happen in "strategies and their failures [...] in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something" (p. 2), while performing disidentifications call for an embracement of difference in an ordinary moment and a more inclusive and liberatory form of being. In doing so, the disidentifying subjects take all this overflowing affect, their position as part of an 'otherness', the subtle moments and impulses in their ordinary encounters, their bodies, their skin and their melancholia to create something bigger. "Disidentification is about cultural, material, and psychic survival" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 161), it is a different way of being an 'other' and rethinking notions of belonging, solidarity, and endurance in the face of trauma and national subjugation, in the face of living in a world where at various points in history some people have shown that they do not want you here.

Conclusion

Affect theory and affective ways of being have always been part of the process of racialization. Through a review of the existing literature on corporeal sensations and the melancholia inherent in the moment one encounters 'strangers', we can begin to unravel the processes by which racialized minorities rebel against dominant

channels of representation that carry with them a history of oppression and differentiation. We also understand how bodies and skin are innate and visual receptors of visceral responses and how the contrast between 'whites' and 'others' encompasses another affective process wherein it homogenizes diversity by ignoring blended cultures such as Asian-Americans or Latinos. Affect is involved in the hateful discourse arising from ideas of white supremacy; however, it is also through affect that avenues of care and community are created within minority spaces.

Amidst the profound and enduring sorrow caused by racial injustice, whether in personal encounters or the media, we must recognize the consequent struggle that exists in the collective imagination and develop a political discourse accordingly. As Cheng (2001) poignantly recalls, addressing the contradictions at the core of minority dialogue should be a priority for the next generation of race scholars to determine the path forward after recognizing that it is the identity that forms the basis for both progress and discrimination. It is necessary to look at the process of racialization through an affective lens. It is necessary to understand the historical and current wrongdoings to change our view towards race transgression, the 'others' memory and minority hope.

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Discourse Circulation and Affective Economies of Feminist Social Media Activism in Pakistan: Case Studies of Two Incidents of Violence Against Women

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Abstract:
Social media activism is an important mode of expression and resistance for counterpublics such as feminist online communities in the contemporary time. This paper analyzes social media activism in the wake of two cases of GBV in Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad. When an event evokes public sentiment, the resulting intense emotion needs "to do something". An "affective public" is formed when the intense emotion of grief, fear, anger or pride circulates through messages online. (Ahmed, 2004; Papacharissi, 2016). In 2021, such affective publics were created when two separate but similar incidents of violence against women took place a year apart in Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad. The brutal murders of Noor Mukadam and Sarah Inam sent shock, grief and anger throughout the nation and affective publics came into form through the hashtags #JusticeforNoor and #JusticeForSarah. The research analyzes these two cases of feminist activism on social media in the wake of these incidents. Following Ahmed (2004), the analysis of the two hashtags reveals that the affective economies of the emotions of grief, shock, pain, trauma and anger at the horror of the murders brought together and aligned feminist activists, and the online communities and publics. Just as these emotions were capable of sliding between these two figures sideways, they could also move backwards and stick to other figures who met a similar fate in the past. Thus the emotions did the work of binding together figures and gathering together people online and offline as they called for action and justice. Their affective force pushed online feminist activism to consolidate the larger feminist movement which then rallied behind the social media activism. This made the feminist counterpublic stronger. The online calls for justice in each case coincided with the unprecedentedly speedy trials and convictions of the murderers.

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Introduction

When an event evokes public sentiment, the resulting intense emotion needs 'to do something.' An "affective public" is formed when the intense emotion of grief, fear, anger or pride circulates through messages online and in groups that share that sentiment or belong to a certain identity marker (Ahmed, 2004; Papacharissi, 2016).

Such an affective public was created when two separate but similar incidents of violence against women took place a year apart in Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad. On 21st July 2021, Pakistani mainstream media broke the news of the brutal murder of Noor Mukadam on the evening of 20th July in Islamabad. At the same time videos and messages surfaced on social media. A year later, the media once again reported a high-profile murder on 23rd September 2022 of Sarah Inam by her husband of three months.

Both these events sent shock, grief and anger throughout the nation, and these emotions acted online, and circulated on different social media platforms and groups, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and connected or glued people together as a collective – the affective publics. People online were 'glued' together as they grieved, expressed their anger and called for action and justice. Hashtags, #JusticeforNoor and #JusticeForSarah, were instantly created following each incident. Feminist social media activism has become widespread around the world since the global #MeToo movement. Studies show a growing relationship between feminist movements and the new media (Crossley, 2017; Martin and Valenti, 2012). The online feminist ecosystem is the latest "innovation in feminism" as young women across the US – and all over the world, in fact – are discovering new ways to "leverage the Internet to make fundamental progress in the unfinished revolution of feminism" (Martin & Valenti, 2012, p. 1).

This paper will analyze two case studies of feminist activism on social media in the wake of the recent incidents of violence against women in Pakistan. It will seek answers to the following:

1.   What do emotions do in feminist social media activism that emerged admonishing Noor Mukadam and Sarah Inam's violent murders?

2.   What content is circulated online through the hashtags #JusticeforNoor and #JusticeForSarah?

3.   How do #JusticeforNoor and #JusticeForSarah circulate discourse in feminist online publics within and outside of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram?

4.   Gender-based violence is endemic in Pakistan (Ali, Inam, 2023). Do all incidents of violence (even when murder is involved) get the same level of social media attention and circulation? What factors made these two incidents more prominent in the media?

To answer these questions, I will analyze the hashtags and the posts on social media websites specifically, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to see which emotions were first expressed through these hashtags on these platforms. Following Ahmed (2004), I will show how emotions stick to the figure of the abused woman, in this case Noor and Sarah. I will then examine the two case studies to analyze how the affective publics came into existence when these emotions circulated on these platforms. I will draw on the affective economies of shock, grief and anger.

The paper will also look at the hashtags more closely to undertake critical discourse analysis and outline the contours of discussion developed by each hashtag and examine their message content. I will also examine whether these cases received more social media attention because of the class and financial status of the victims and the perpetrators; and whether the accused were tried on social media, in which case, individuals through social media would have performed the role of the jury. I will examine this through the lens of the theory of moral panics.

The data collection method involves gathering social media posts from Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook directly from the hashtags. The timeframe is between July 21, 2021 and December 31, 2023, beginning from the first incident and ending with the conviction in the second incident. This covers important milestones during each case, the overlap, and combined reactions to both incidents. The sample includes 65 posts from various demographic and social groups including women, men, families, friends and acquaintances of the victims, media personalities, legal professionals, and rights activists from within and outside Pakistan.

The paper argues that in the wake of the violent and gruesome murders of Noor Mukadam and Sarah Inam, the circulation of public anger, grief and disgust formed a community online that was then able to simultaneously rally for action offline. The online feminist publics consolidated the affect and converted it into concrete action in the form of protests, and calls for justice.

The paper also argues that among many cases of gender-based violence, the two cases discussed got the most media coverage because they involved prominent,

influential and affluent people and because courts took them up in almost unprecedentedly speedy trials.

The paper also notes that women born and brought up outside the Pakistani society, in the diaspora, do not have sufficient primary and secondary socialization to be able to use the emotional, psychological and strategic tools to navigate the pervasive patriarchal culture. Their naivety, especially as seen in these two cases, affects their resocialization after relocating to or making connections in Pakistani society.

Context and Background

What particularly stood out in both these incidents was that they were high-profile cases. Noor Mukadam, 27, was an ex-ambassador's daughter and Sarah Inam, 37, was an Abu Dhabi-based economist and the daughter-in-law of a prominent journalist and ex-member of parliament. The accused belonged to the elite and were sons of well-off parents. Interestingly, Noor Mukadam's murderer is a Pakistani American and Sarah Inam was a Canadian citizen, educated at the University of Waterloo. The personalities involved were not middle-class Pakistanis nor were the relationships in each case the commonly arranged ones (Dawn, 2022). Noor Mukadam went to visit Zahir Jaffer on the night of 18th July, 2021 after he had told her he was flying to the United States the next day. He had proposed to marry her when she visited but, upon her refusal, became infuriated. He had, apparently, planned to surprise her with a trip to the States if she affirmed or kill her if she refused (Geo News, 2021). The CCTV footage gathered after the incident shows both leaving with suitcases in a taxi Zahir had ordered, only to return minutes later and enter the house again. He kept her in unlawful custody for almost two days, while she attempted to escape multiple times, once by jumping off the window onto a terrace. She is stopped at the gate by the house guard and gardener. Meanwhile, Zaher chased and dragged her out of the guard room where she had attempted to hide. He dragged her into the house again. When Noor's mother called her on the morning of the 20th to ask about her whereabouts, she informed her (reportedly under duress) that she travelled to another city, Lahore, and will return in a day or two.

Later Zaher called Noor's Father, Shaukat Mukadam, and told her categorically that Noor was not with him contrary to what their mutual friends were suggesting. Later, on the 20th he remained in communication with his business tycoon father and wealthy mother, who runs a therapy clinic in Islamabad, but were at the time in Karachi. After the murder and beheading took place, which followed physical and sexual abuse, Zahir's father, Zakir Jaffer, sent a team of therapists from the therapy

clinic to handle the situation. (This was incidentally the clinic where earlier Zahir was treated and trained to become a physiotherapist.) The police were tipped off by neighbours at that point, when the situation got out of hand, with Zakir getting hyper, threatening, and injuring a therapy team member. Zahir was arrested on the spot. The police informed Noor's father of the incident and he visited the Jaffer residence and then filed the First Information Report at the police station (Dawn, 2022).

The devastating news of the gruesome murder and beheading was reported in the mainstream media. The hashtag #JusticeforNoor was created and online publics started posting on the hashtag as well as on other online forums, groups and news media websites.

After an unprecedented speedy trial Zahir Jaffer, booked under premediated murder, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani court, for beheading Noor, 25 years imprisonment with a fine of Rs 200,000 for rape, ten years in jail with a Rs 100,000 fine for abduction and a one-year jail term for keeping Noor in illegal confinement. Zahir's two household employees were sentenced to 10 years in prison each (Arab News, 2022). Zahir's 25-year sentence for rape was turned into another death sentence after the court upheld his initial death sentence, which he had appealed against (Bhatti, 2023).

The other incident of gender-based violence in this paper pertains to Sarah Inam who was born in Libya and went to school there, in Islamabad and Canada. She was working in Abu Dhabi as an economist for the last several years and, according to her father, had not wanted to marry up until July when she told her parents that she had married. Her father, who lives in Canada with her family, flew to Abu Dhabi. He advised her to have a marriage celebration although he was not initially happy with the marriage. He spoke to her husband, Shahnawaz Amir, who was living with his divorced mother, Samina Shah, at their Islamabad farmhouse. He asked Shahnawaz to share the marriage contract papers with him, but Shahnawaz evaded (Aaj News, 2023).

According to the First Information Report filed on the complaint of a nearby police station officer, Shahnawaz fought with his wife Sarah after she refused to send him money from Abu Dhabi. He also divorced her on the phone, after which Sarah Inam reached Islamabad on September 22, 2022. The next day following heated arguments, Shahnawaz hit Sarah with a showpiece. When she made a noise, he hit her several times on the head with a 5kg dumbbell until she succumbed to her injuries on September 23, 2022. He then hid the body in the bathtub. His mother informed his father who told her to lock him up so he could not try to escape. Several hours later Samina informed the police who then arrested Shahnawaz. Parents of the accused in

both Noor and Sarah's cases were arrested by the police for investigation and were initially indicted but later released on lack of evidence of involvement in the murders. A verdict that was appealed by both women's fathers. Sarah was laid to rest on September 28 after which her father pursued the case against Shahnawaz. Shahnanwaz's journalist father, Ayaz Amir, described in a newspaper op-ed that his son was an addict and did not work. When Ayaz met Sarah for the first time, he asked her why she married him, and she replied that she would handle him. He then told his son to try to make himself worthy of her. Shahnawaz was sentenced to death on December 14, 2023 with a fine of Rs 1 million to be given to Sarah's family. Shahnawaz has appealed his sentence.

Discussion

Affective publics are "soft, networked structures of feeling that help us tell stories about who we are, who we imagine we might be, and how we might get there" (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 311). There is often no organization within these networks, yet the common emotion or sentiment is the "glue" of identity (Persson, 2017). These networks can bring various collectives into form, they can "reinforce, challenge, and rework stereotypes, and can glue people together in a different way" (Carlson & Frazer, 2021, p. 51).

The hashtag #JusticeForNoor was created by Noor's US-based close friend. It was an expression of her shock, grief and deep anger and wish to bring the murderer to justice. The hashtag quickly gained popularity and following, and coincided with mainstream media coverage of the case. Other social media users including both women and men shared their sentiments using the hashtag on Facebook and Twitter. Qarar (2021) reported a day after the incident, "The grisly murder of the woman sparked fresh debate about the safety of women in the federal capital, with the hashtag #JusticeForNoor attracting tens of thousands of tweets. This was reportedly the third brutal attack on a woman in the country in the past few days."

Several of Noor's friends around the world, wrote on social media and online publications, expressing their shock, remembering her as a kind-hearted person. Similarly, Sarah was remembered by shocked friends as an intelligent woman (Bari, 2021). Two days after the incident, on Eid, the annual religious festival when Muslims sacrifice an animal in remembrance of Prophet Abraham's sacrifice, Pakistani celebrities tweeted on #JusticeForNoor. They expressed their sadness and horror on the festive day, and were in a solemn vein, condemning the brutal murder in anger.

What Did These Emotions Do

Social media help to "get bodies on the ground, in acts of physical protests" (Carlson & Frazer, 2016). Exactly a month after the murder on 20th September 2021, Noor's sister Sara Mukadam's video message went viral. She expressed her grief saying life would not be the same without Noor and called for a vigil outside Islamabad Press Club two days later. In the message, she called on Noor's friends, members of the civil society and law-abiding citizens to come together to express support and solidarity so that justice could be served (Qureshi, 2021).

The case also brought people onto the street not only in Islamabad but also in other cities around the world including Dublin and New York. On a Twitter post, a New York protestor said: "I didn't expect this incredible turnout. It's clear we're going through collective grief and despair, but just for 2 hours today, I felt hope. #nycfornoor" (Instagram, 2021). Through the expression of grief and despair and bound by these emotions, a collective was formed. The Washington Post (2021) reported that the murder had "stirred anger in Pakistan and diaspora communities, which have held vigils and rallied around her online."

When celebrities tweeted on #JusticeForNoor, they remembered two other women, Saima and Quratul Ain, both of whom were murdered by their husbands just days before Noor's brutal murder. They also urged the public not to forget these women.

Similarly, expressing shock and grief after Sarah Inam's murder, an actress tweeted on #JusticeforSarah remembering that justice or the death sentence had not even been carried out in Noor Mukadam's case yet (The Friday Times, 2022). These are examples of emotions moving backwards from one figure to another online.

As well offline, there has been collaboration between the families of the two women, in physical consolidation of affect. On September 23, 2023, a year after Sarah Inam's murder, fathers of the two women held a press conference, a rare move by victims' families. They demanded justice for Sarah's murder (Dawn, 2023).

The emotions helped to form a collective by aligning or connecting bodily space with social space. Drawing from Ahmed (2004), it can be seen that the emotions described above stick (adherence) to the figures of Noor and Sarah, and bind them together as the violently abused and murdered women (coherence). Therefore, the emotions are not merely housed in the figures of these two women but slide through them to bind all other figures who have or do meet a similar fate at the hand of patriarchal tendencies. While emotions slide sideways between objects or figures,

they also move backwards to similar figures in the past. "In other words, it is the failure of emotions to be located in a body, object, or figures that allows emotions to (re)produce or generate the effects that they do" (Ahmed, 2004). The emotions of shock, anger, grief and sympathy have aligned with the larger collective of abused women subjected to gender-based violence in the past and present (as well as those anticipated in the future – "who gives us nightmares about the future, as an anticipated future of injury" Ahmed, 2004, p. 123). Taking the argument further, the collective of women subjected to violence simultaneously aligns with the community of feminist activists and supporters forming the affective public described by Papacharissi (2016).

At the same time, in these two cases it is seen that, as Carlson and Frazer (2021) have explained, the affective force of anger mediated a speedy response on social media. Because anger is a powerful emotion that requires an immediate ear (or eyes), social media provides an instant platform where it can be expressed with as much force and as much immediacy.

There were immediate calls for justice especially with the creation of hashtags. Activists used the #JusticeForNoor to rally people offline by announcing Noor's birthday vigils, a conference attended by feminist activists on her death anniversary and protests outside Islamabad Press Club to rally in solidarity and to call for justice. The hashtag was also used to post murder trial updates to keep the online public informed. Even when after the sentence in Noor's case, there were rumours that the murderer was released and would be sent to the US, the hashtag discredited the news as fake and affirmed its belief in the justice system which calmed the online public.

As the proceedings advanced in the Sarah Inam case, they were updated on the #Justicefor Noor. The verdict came out on December 14, 2023 and the #JusticeforNoor posted a call for show of support for Sara outside the court at 11 am. The post said the cause for Sara Inam was close to their heart. Thus, the publics are connected through the emotion of sympathy for the murdered women, and concern for the cause of violence against women.

The theory of passion defines emotion as something that accumulates over time (Ahmed, 2004). In this case, the grief and sympathy for one victim has intensified as the public follows the proceedings of the case of the second victim. The cause is not forgotten rather it is consolidated and affirmed.

Discourse Circulation on #JusticeForNoor and #JusticeforSarah:

The content of the hashtags ranges from the strong expression of emotion to the analysis of the root cause to remedial solutions to commentaries on parenting and Pakistan's social justice, as well as a fear of justice not being served. All the content supports feminist activism. As explained by Kuo (2018), activist hashtags can be used by counterpublics, feminist counterpublic in this case, to spread information, protest and ask for their demands to be met, in these cases: justice. The hashtags are an example of real-time conversations, demonstrations and dissemination as part of the greater feminist activism.

The families also expressed their sentiments using the hashtags. In the video message shared on social media, Sara appealed to the civil society, friends of Noor and all the law-abiding people to come and join a protest outside the Islamabad Press Club at 4:30pm two days after the murder, and express solidarity and support for Noor so that justice could be served (Arab News, 2021).

Fiza Bari, a friend of Noor's from the time her father was posted in Ireland, wrote for a magazine a week after her murder expressing her shock and anger. "My mind then switches back to anger, and bile rises in my throat," she wrote in Brown Girl Magazine. After discussing the girl she knew and their sweet memories, she discussed the root cause of gender-based violence, providing effective solutions that start at home. The magazine article was then published by US-based print and online magazine The Muslim Observer (TMO, 2021).

Celebrities tweeting on #JusticeForNoor also introspected on the causes of the endemic gender-based violence in the country with one male celebrity giving thorough advice to men on seeking and helping their brethren with, emotional support to relieve pent-up aggression that could lead to violence. One award-winning female star brought people's attention to the fact that this was indeed "gender-based violence" (Twitter, 2021). Thus, the discourse goes deeper into the root causes of, and the solutions to, widespread gender violence.

The wife of a Kashmiri leader also tweeted on #JusticeforSarah, calling for societal change in attitudes and mindsets where divorce should not be a taboo and expressed that a divorced daughter was better than a dead one. She also warned parents not to marry off their sons who are not mentally stable and do not know how to behave with women (The Friday Times, 2022).

In the analysis of the content of the hashtags using the technique for investigating the "internet and digital phenomena, artifacts, and culture" (Brock, 2018), one Instagram post stood out with the user's similar lived experience as Noor and Sarah. The user goes deep into unpacking the elitist misogynist culture in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, where women are not safe. Especially women who settle there with their families after having lived elsewhere in the world. This post filled the gap in the content related to the specific example of women who had been raised or lived outside Pakistan.

However, the hashtags did not touch upon a similar proposition that women like Noor and Sarah who have been born and raised in diasporas but who later come to live anywhere in Pakistan, not just in Islamabad, are not equipped to navigate and adapt to the patriarchal culture. To explain this phenomenon, which is relevant in the examples of Jordan-born Noor and Libyan-born Canadian national Sarah, the theory of socialization can be used. Since these women's primary and secondary socialization, as explained by Parsons (1956), make no mention of patriarchy and ways to navigate a system rife with it, these women are rather handicapped to adapt to the patriarchal life in Pakistani society. They become the easiest preys of men raised and brought up in Pakistan. Primary socialization takes place through parents and family who set rules, and instill norms and values in children. Secondary socialization takes place through the young person's interactions within society, which familiarize her with societal norms, culture, values and behaviours. Since children from diasporas are away from their culture and society these socializations fail to fully acquaint them with their societal norms. This is especially true in Sarah's case, whose father-in-law is a politician and landlord, social groups with the most power and privilege. Even though Zahir, Noor's murderer, is a Pakistani-American dual national, his conditioning for the most part inside Pakistan explains his deviation and can be attributed to Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity. It is an analytical tool that identifies behaviours and tendencies among men that govern gender relations i.e. between men and women and between men. Hegemonic masculinity perpetuates gender inequality, men's domination over women and weaker groups of men.

Moreover, such socialization results in naivety, which was a factor for these women to end up trapped, and which contrasts with the socialization of both perpetrators in these cases. Both the women saw the best in others, while both perpetrators were known to have an addiction of some sort besides their hegemonic masculinity. These individual tendencies ultimately led the women to be "trapped", as Sarah's father described her ordeal.

Case Studies Through the Lens of Moral Panics

Since the cases garnered media and public attention and the incidents became a reason for panic, sensationalism and controversy, it is relevant to discuss the moral panic these cases elicited. According to the theory of moral panics, the reaction to any perceived threat is disproportionate as the media repeatedly reinforces the threat, along with the state institutions. However, with new media, the theory has been revised by Reeves and Ingraham (2016) who conclude "that the culture of shaming has become prevalent, and every ordinary citizen has become the judge and jury with extreme consequences." As Reeves and Ingraham (2016) wrote, online publics become the jury, similarly in the cases of Noor and Sarah, several tweets and posts actually incriminated the accused before their sentences were announced. According to the online magazine, Matrixmag (2021) Zahir and his family were already facing a social media trial and online activists had clearly expressed that an unfair outcome of the trial would not be acceptable. However, the cases deviate from Reeves and Ingraham's (2016) new theory in that, independently, justice took its course even though the accused were incriminated on social media. Their punishments were indeed spelt out by the legal system.

Yet other aspects of the theory of moral panics do explain these cases accurately. For example, there was a real chance of social unrest for which reason a state institution ordered a warning to broadcasters. Moreover, there was an expression of a seemingly exaggerated response when online publics and feminist protestors commented that these incidents could happen to anyone and no one knows really where the threat lurks.

So according to Reeves and Ingraham (2016), 'the implications of this state of affairs are manifold, from the disruption of traditional relations of publicity and privacy (Andrejevic, 2007), to the escalation of social unrest (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012), to all the ways citizens now act as surrogate sensing mechanisms of the police (Ritchie, 2015), as broadcast mechanisms of the state (Reeves, in press), and as laborers producing data on which corporations capitalize (Scholz, 2012).'

Similar to Andrejevic's (2007) proposition, Zahir and his mother told reporters at a court appearance that they too had privacy, which should be respected (Dawn, 2023). The risk of social unrest as pointed out by DeLuca et al. (2012) became real. This risk was so palpable during the case of Noor Mukadam's murder that the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) prohibited broadcasters from airing the footage of Noor Mukadam's attempts to escape the Jaffer house (The Express Tribune, 2021).

A few tweets as well as Facebook and Instagram posts expressed a real scare about any woman or girl being caught in a similar situation as Noor or Sarah. In one example, a Pakistani journalist, who says she is Sarah's friend from Canada, tweeted on #JusticeForSarah that "this could be any of us or our daughters" and urged people to speak up against this atrocity (The Friday Times, 2022). Another post in which a senator called for justice to be served in Noor Mukadam's case, said that "such brutal crimes had terrorized society. And many of us have sleepless nights" (Twitter, 2021).

Moral panics also are differential. They discriminate against certain groups. There are countless cases of gender-based violence including domestic violence where victims are sometimes even murdered, yet not all incidents find such media attention. Fatima Bhutto, a columnist and granddaughter and niece of two former prime ministers of Pakistan, tweeted that Noor's murder was a test case for the justice system and reflected the role of power and influence. She wrote that many women met a similar fate as Noor's but did not find justice because they were unknown and poor (The Washington Post, 2021). Likewise, in a tweet on #JusticeforSarah, an actress noted that only the cases of high-profile murders or abusers become #twitter trends (The Friday Times, 2022).

Since the victims and murderers belonged to well-connected circles, the media picked up the news with greater interest. However, it is noteworthy that the ICT access that the victims' families and loved ones had, propelled the hashtags into popularity. Alongside, the pressing pursuit of the trials by the victims' fathers made the social media campaign more effective. For example when the US Embassy staff met Zahir to check on him because he is a US citizen, it definitely made news. The embassy could not affect his release because justice was to take its course in a foreign country. Yet this stance of the embassy was also seen as a dichotomy. A thread of tweets commented on the double standard that the "pure American" a suspected undercover agent Raymond Davis was released by the embassy while being tried in Pakistan but that the Pakistani American did not meet the same standard and would not be released (Twitter, 2021). Therefore, incidents of the magnitude of these brutal killings stir moral panics among online publics.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two hashtags #JusticeForNoor and #JusticeforSarah revealed that the affective economies of the emotions that outpoured following the brutal murders of Noor Mukadam and Sarah Inam made those emotions of grief, shock, pain, trauma and anger stick to the figures of these women and bound them together in a collective. As these emotions were capable of sliding between these two

figures sideways, they could also move backwards and stick to other figures who met a similar fate in the past, incidentally, two women just a few days before Noor's murder. Shock and grief were expressed for them too. Thus, the emotions do not reside within any of these abused women but pass between them, binding them together. The intense outpouring of emotions due to the horror of the murders against women brought together and aligned all feminist activists, online activists and the online communities and publics. Thus, the emotions did the work of binding together figures and gathering people online and offline. This formed an affective public and caused affect to increase over time.

Discourse online on the hashtags was diverse with the immediate expression of shock, grief, sadness, and anger forming the online feminist activism and joined by, and consolidating, the larger feminist movement that rallied behind the media activism. There was also organizing and rallying support through the hashtags, organizing people for offline and in-person participation in protests. There was discourse about the wider societal problem beyond the immediate. The endemic gender-based violence and the identification of its root causes and solutions were all shared and expressed through the hashtags. Most importantly there were consistent calls for justice in both cases. Similarly, the discourse circulated across social media, X, Facebook and Instagram, and news websites. There were updates, comments and personal expressions. This made the feminist online public stronger and users could rally behind a cause for the society.

However, the cases of Noor and Sarah showed that some cases of violence become more prominent than others. The explanations for this are the positions of privilege and affluence the victims and culprits enjoyed. The cases also heightened the perception of threat from patriarchal violence. In conclusion, the overwhelming emotion offers testament to the power of social media for feminist activism, which can be a unifying force for feminist causes, but class distinctions seem to undermine that potential of social media.

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Indigenous Performance as Communication: Lighting the Fire for Social Change

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Abstract:

This paper is inspired by an innate cultural understanding that performance has always been a form of communication amongst Indigenous peoples. Indigenous songs, dances, stories, and cultural protocols have been expressed through performance as a means of communicating since time immemorial. The study of communication theory is rooted in the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. This paper draws parallels between communication theory and the performing arts by highlighting the commonalities within both fields of study, suggesting that there is a case to be made that performance is a form of communication. This paper aims to build on a larger theory that the performing arts can inspire a human emotional response to create social change. In the 1960s and 1970s, cultural studies in communication and the study of performance art, were influenced by the same political and social contexts of their time. This paper explores how historical influences shape cognitive and emotional responses to social change and considers how Indigenous performance could become a method for communicating social change in a post-Truth and Reconciliation era. Rather than a policy, this paper suggests that Indigenous performance can move settler communities towards feeling reconciliation, a reconciliation communicated by Indigenous people themselves.

Keywords: Performing arts; Indigenous cultural resurgence; decolonization; social change; cultural studies

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The first time I witnessed a live and contemporary Indigenous performance I wept. My tears were an emotional reaction to the truth I witnessed on stage. Indigenous artists and performers were visually expressing their cultural and historic realities that I also shared. The magnitude of this experience was so moving that it inspired me to get involved in performance myself. I was quickly moved to develop relationships with local Indigenous performers and artists. During this time, I was working as an investigative analyst, investigating the critical injury and death of children and youth in government care, with a particular focus on Indigenous children and youth. Through my professional work, I saw a lot of policies being developed however not a lot of change was happening for Indigenous peoples. Although I had witnessed the beginning and ongoing work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, I did not see positive results for Indigenous children and youth in government care. Regardless of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, there remain far too many Indigenous children being removed from their homes and communities for things beyond the control of their elected leadership. Working with Indigenous artists and performers allowed me to see the importance of expression and community connection. A lot of the work we did together, as artists, required us to dig into our emotional landscapes of shared experiences. It quickly became apparent that many of us shared similar stories and experiences as Indigenous women, despite varying cultural backgrounds. A sense of collective emotion was felt amongst us, a sense of belonging.

Most academic writing about performance falls within the category of theatre, film, and music. Stol:lo/Skwah academic Dylan Robinson writes and educates extensively on the subject of decolonizing the practice of listening, illustrating the importance of Indigenous cultural resurgence in the arts. In significant ways, his work has been advancing the inclusion of Indigenous artists in the performing arts and academia. He continuously collaborates with others by bringing together people, ideas, and art that are rooted in traditional Indigenous knowledges. Lindsay Lechance is an Anishinaabe/Algonquin, award-winning dramaturge, and associate professor at the University of British Columbia that writes and educates about Indigenous land-based dramaturgy. Jill Carter is an Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi associate professor at the University of Toronto who has done extensive work bringing Indigenous knowledge into theatre practices. I credit all the scholars who are contributing to a more substantive understanding of Indigenous knowledge in the academy. This work is often deeply connected to personal and family histories, testimonies of combatting colonialism through the perseverance of learning how to navigate settler institutions. It's also the work of accomplished academics that has supported my learning and has helped me to better understand that Indigenous performance can be considered a form of communication.

One point this paper aims to make is that performance can be understood as a form of communication. Drawing upon the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, a parallel is made between the human psyche and the act of performing. Referencing Patrick Kavanaugh's 2010 article, *"Escaping the Phantom's Ghostly Grasp: On Psychoanalysis as a Performance Art in the Spirit World*," a consideration of how performance and psychoanalysis are connected is also explored. In addition, a particular focus is given to the Surrealist movement, and Antoin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty'. The correlation between psychoanalysis and performance is a necessary junction that serves as the foundation of inquiry for this paper, and helps ask: *How can the performing arts contribute towards social change?* By examining the historical connections between cultural studies, as introduced by Stuart Hall and Angela McRobbie, and the history of performance art in the 1970s, this paper will argue that the performing arts contribute towards social change movements. The importance here will be to focus on Indigenous performance as a mechanism to help move settler audiences toward a deeper and genuine understanding of what reconciliation can mean. The idea is that performance can create a resonating empathy amongst an audience to help them transform their consciousness. Andrea Ledding explains theatre as performance, "... people's words and objects are transformed into something more than they were; the audience becomes part of this transformation, and the energy creates, changes, shifts paradigms" (2016, p.143).

To understand theories of consciousness, the work of Sigmund Freud is studied to understand that what he considers the unconscious is also the 'repressed'. As explained by Freud, S., Stachey, J., Freud, A., and Rothgeb, C.L., "There is no doubt that the resistance of the conscious and unconscious ego operates under the sway of the pleasure principle: it seeks to avoid the unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed" (1953, p.20). If we think about this concept, of communication, we begin to understand why the promise of social media's instant gratification is so seductive. With each scroll we are engaging with the pleasure principle, constantly avoiding what lies within our unconsciousness, that which is repressed. Sabina Spielrein offers another explanation of the unconscious thought process, albeit more congruent with how we understand the connection between unconscious and conscious thoughts, "Analogous unconscious thoughts or images accompany every conscious thought or image and transform the products of conscious thought into a specific language (1994, p.157). Here, we can begin to understand the process of how we create language and meaning from the images we associate with our unconscious and conscious thoughts. I want to pause here for a moment and encourage the reader to consider the social and political influences of Freud's theories. His work was heavily influenced by his drive to understand responses associated with childhood trauma and memories from early infancy

(David-Menard, 2014). According to Sigmund Freud, much of our human condition can be explained by understanding our impulsive drives which are connected to our early life experiences (1953). There are parallels between early life experiences and performance as well, as performance is often the expression of repressed memories. Dylan Robinson explains,

> Our childhood memories are suffused with the materiality of wonder and disappointment, as well as violence and shock. Because they exist at the distance of childhood, some of these memories are less memories than imprecise textures- the feelings and impressions of past moments. We carry the spectral presence of the past in our bodies, and it is only when we encounter the likeness of the past in the present that the *thing* we have been carrying exits the body. Tethered to memories that refuse to leave, our bodies experience sensations so powerful that they can often bring us back to moments we would rather forget (2016, p.43).

In the paragraph above Dylan Robinson refers to a 'spectral presence', a lingering of our subconscious memories from childhood, dormant until something triggers them. Patrick Kavanaugh writes about the relationship between theatre and the human condition, suggesting: "Wherever there is culture there are forms of theatre; and as a cultural phenomenon, the theatre is generally seen as a source of entertainment or a diversion from real life" (2010, p.2). Kavanaugh uses Aristotle's theatre as an example, noting that actors would typically solve a psychological conflict by the end of the play, and that the insights were meant to provide, "mastery over the disruptive and turbulent passions underlying the basic dramas of everyday life" (2010, p.20). This is where I believe psychoanalysis and performance are inherently linked, through their repetition of representation and imagination, where the creation of art is imitating the subconscious. Sybille Kramer elaborates further,

> The goal of psychoanalysis is more than simply to 'raise' the unconscious to consciousness through verbalization and memory: Its goal is to transform a cliche-ridden pattern of feeling, and transference is the process by which a mutation of the repeated takes place. The analyst is thus the mediator and medium of transference (2015, p.126).

Sybille's explanation of the analyst as a mediator and a medium of transference reveals similarities between the audience and a performer, as a performance becomes an expression of transference that the audience receives. Patrick Kavanaugh's research on the connection between theatre and psychoanalysis is most evident through his study of Artaud's 'Theater of Cruelty'.

Dramatic action on stage is not intended to provide insights about universal psychological truths in the service of reason conquering the disruptive passions of life. Rather, his theatre intends to generate awe, anxiety, and terror in the audience for the purpose of causing an abandonment of reason. In so doing, a new set of truths emerges as the spectators connect with more primitive forces of their being (2010, p.21).

Many of these theories are based on the philosophical ideas of representation and the connection between images, words, and thoughts. These theories are quite like the musings of Freud and Lacan who understood that the unconscious mind produces messages that can be interpreted by an analyst and/or an audience. Although Freud and Lacan may have differed in their opinion about how the unconscious mind works, they both agreed on the repetition of representation, which is also a significant part of performance. As summarized by Kavanaugh, "As performance art, the analytic discourse enters into the dramas of life and death as produced, directed, and choreographed by the subject and as communicated via the associative-interpretive process" (2010, p.22). How we conduct meaning from art is arguably subjective. Where psychoanalysis is grounded in theories tested on human subjects, art remains open to interpretation. People are drawn to the arts because of desire, emotion, human connection, or simply entertainment. Melissa Dolese explains that both the arts and communication are rooted in social interactions and seek to create meaning from their outcome, "the creation and reception of art has always been a social act of considerable importance, infused to impact and affect one another on cognitive and emotional levels" (2021, p.673). The creation of meaning is foundational to art, psychology, and communication.

The study of communication theory is grounded in the same ideas offered by art and psychology, and it is also shaped by the same historical influences. Tancredi Gusman explains that throughout the late 1950s and 1960s artists began experimenting with live artistic expression as an extension of the visual arts, and in the 1970s performance became an art genre (2019). Gusman suggests performance art is a non-reproducible event that challenges and resists the institutional and disciplinary framework of the visual arts. Historically, the late 1960s and the early 1970s sparked personal liberation and rebellion against authority. North Americans were questioning the Vietnam War, inflation was on the rise, and politicians were found guilty of modern treason. A large public distrust swept over several countries in the West, and this impacted the world of scholarly discourse. The combination of personal liberation and distrust of authority gave rise to neo-Marxism (McRobbie, 2005). By the mid-1970s the Birmingham school was well underway, and Stuart Hall was distinguishing the idea that media and television were not totalitarian. Hall's

ideas were centered on the belief that media offered a range of potential meanings determined by the viewer (McRobbie, 2005). This was a significant pivot for media studies because it offered the audience autonomy over how they interpreted what they were viewing.

The parallels between the birth of performance art and cultural studies within media are astounding. Both fields of social interaction and meaning were influenced by the same sentiments of personal liberation and resistance to authority. Where the visual arts were looking to expand beyond the rigidity of singular documentation, communication studies were looking to expand beyond the limitations of psychoanalysis. The work that expanded from the Birmingham school explained how politics and media influenced one another. This is highlighted by the examples given by Stuart Hall about Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberalism:

> Mrs. Thatcher's discourse was also effective, argues Hall, for its interpolative capacity. It brought new subjects into being by naming them in a popular language. The concerned parent fed up with too-liberal teachers. The anxious hospital patient who wanted to have surgery on the day of his or her choice, in order to get back to work as soon as possible. The fearful owner-occupier who wanted to see 'more bobbies on the beat'. The upwardly mobile council tenant who wanted to buy his or her property from the council as soon as possible, and so on. By stitching together these new constituencies in the language of fairness, choice, and modernity there was, as Hall argues, a reshaping of democracy (McRobbie, 2005, p. 123).

With this insight, Hall shows how the relationship between media and politics begins to reshape modern democracy using public discourse. Hall was an instrumental theorist in the field of cultural studies in communication. Beyond questioning the simplicity of manipulation with media, he also called attention to how the media shaped identity and difference. In one of Hall's famous quotes, "The English are not racist because they hate the Blacks but because they don't know who they are without the Blacks, they have to know who they are not to know who they are" (1989, p.16). Identity discourse is fundamentally about difference. Hall understood that identity was socially constructed, and that the creation of difference is a process that occurs over time (1989, p.16). He further explains,

> So the relationship of the kind of ethnicity I'm talking about to the past is not a simple, essential one- it is a constructed one. It is constructed in history; it is constructed politically in part. It is part narrative. We tell ourselves the stories of the parts of our roots in order to come into contact, creatively with it. So, this new kind of ethnicity, the emergent ethnicities- has a relationship to the

past, but it is a relationship that is partly through memory, partly through narrative, one that has to be recovered. It is an act of cultural recovery (1989, p.19).

Hall's understanding of how cultural identity is socially constructed gives context to what has taken place in the performing arts community since the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. During the pandemic, the performing arts community went through a radical shift in their perception of representation. When the world shut down and social interactions were restricted, the performing arts community suffered tremendously as live performances were no longer permitted. For some performing arts organizations, this prompted a shift in their organizational consciousness. For example, in their 2020-2023 strategic plan, the National Arts Centre of Canada wrote:

> ...in a period of upheaval for the performing arts that includes the tremendous challenges posed to artists, performing arts centres and venues by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the widespread recognition of the need to eliminate racism from our institutions. At the NAC, we see an opportunity for profound change. We imagine a vibrant, renewed performing arts ecosystem that includes a wider spectrum of stories, cultures, and artists. We imagine greater access and opportunities for engagement with the performing arts for all...https://nac-cna.ca/en/media/newsrelease/35063

It's not easy creating and maintaining change but after spending some time at the NAC in 2024, I can attest that this organization did take its strategic plan seriously and made modifications to include more cultural diversity at the executive level of artistic direction.

There are many ways to consider transformation and change within us, communities, and societies. In many Indigenous cultures, transformation is considered a highly spiritual and powerful concept. Whether it's the Coyote (Monkman, 2005) or the Raven (Niatum, 2018), tricksters appear in Indigenous myths to tell tales of great transformation, good and bad. Transformation within the context of the performing arts is also congruent with transformation within the human psyche. Dylan Robinson explains transformation can be expressed as a sentiment of reconciliation amongst audience members: "Indigenous intercultural and inclusionary music performances do more than simply reflect a visual, aural, and symbolic coming together; audience members' transformative and affective experiences are felt as a form of reconciliation in themselves (2016, p.280).

Canadians have been living in a post-Truth and Reconciliation era since 2015. The TRC was created to bring attention to those who survived residential schools in Canada. This piece of Canadian history marks a significant turning point for scholars, policymakers, and artists. The acknowledgment of such a devastating aspect of our shared history has created opportunities for healing, while also reopening past wounds. It is equally devastating that currently only *13 of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action have been implemented by the Canadian government.* In 2023, the Canadian government failed to take even one TRC's Call to Action. Many Indigenous cultures share prophecies and stories to inspire resiliency and survival in their communities. The Anishinaabe people of Canada have a teaching called the *Seventh Fire Prophecies* (Kimmerer, 2013, Fiola, 2015, Nolan, 2015). This ancestral story tells the past, present, and future of the Anishinaabe people in Canada. Chantal Fiola explains:

> The Seven Fires Prophecy was given to the Anishinaabeg in the distant, pre-contact history by a series of prophets and triggered a great migration among the Anishinaabeg who would heed its warnings. Some Anishinaabe Elders believe that each of the fires (or eras of time) that were predicted have come to pass and that we are currently in the time of the Seventh Fire (2015, p.2).

Canadian playwright, Yvette Nolan, believes that these prophecies are resurfacing in a time of cultural resurgence, a time for Indigenous people and settlers to work together to achieve justice and live together harmoniously (2015). As someone with mixed ancestry myself, I feel as though I am constantly straddling both Indigenous and settler worlds. Metis people are often referred to as the *invisible people* because they are neither Indigenous nor settler Canadian, but rather a blend of Indigenous and settler that dates to the beginning of colonization in Canada. Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall coined the term *Two-Eyed Seeing,* "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (2012, p.335). I have spent a considerable amount of my life working with people who have and are experiencing intergenerational trauma. I am humbled by the number of stories I have heard from survivors of residential schools, and additionally hearing them speak about their children and grandchildren struggling with other forms of institutional oppression. It does not appear that reports are making much difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada. There might be an initial buzz around the release of a report but it's often the case that these reports are written by professionals that cannot implement the changes they write about in their reports.

The inspiration for this paper comes from witnessing the power that Indigenous performance has to change the beliefs and attitudes of settler Canadians. After producing an Indigenous performance in 2022, I was overwhelmed with the amount of feedback from the audience saying that they wanted further opportunities to engage with the emotions they felt while witnessing Indigenous expressions of reconciliation. Reconciliation should not be about making settlers feel comfortable with their privilege; nor is it about participating in reconciliatory efforts that erase the past. Colonization is ongoing and it is necessary to express all emotions associated with the grief, loss, anguish, and trauma that Indigenous people have experienced due to their culture being stripped away. Learning about the traumatic stories of residential schools, the 'sixties scoop', murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, and the mistreatment of Indigenous children and youth in foster care is beyond disheartening, it's also overwhelming. It is not possible to create change when one is feeling overwhelmed. It is helpful to remember that the core intention of colonization; its purpose was to remove children from their families, traditions, customs, and communities, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. Therefore, how can we practice true reconciliation without bringing Indigenous culture back?

For me, performance matters a lot. Indigenous performance has become a platform for social change because I believe in its ability to shift public consciousness and create opportunities for younger generations to become involved in their culture. Working within a deficit framework of social services can be exhausting- your livelihood depends on the misfortune of others. For years, every interaction I had with Indigenous communities, including my own, was centered on what was not working. Funding for the Indigenous organizations I worked for was contingent on the number of Indigenous people who needed help. The funding increased if the need increased. Imagine you are struggling with your culture being rendered invisible in the context of greater society. You and your family have struggled to make sense of a generation that was abused and neglected by the government and now that same government wants to control your healing process, but the only true healing you need is to have your culture returned. Canadians are often unaware as to how colonization is still occurring in society, because it is embedded within legislation, policies, and professionalism.

The performing arts offer a myriad of opportunities to be entertained and transformed. It offers performers and audience members the opportunity to experience the same range of emotions. Some Indigenous performing artists claim this connection is equivalent to ceremony, Yvette Nolan explains,

Creating ceremony onstage is powerful medicine. Like all medicine, ceremony is about reconnecting: reconnecting the artist to her ancestors, the viewer to lost histories, the actor to the audience. In some cases, the ceremony is overt, and the artist is a guide to cultural practice that may or may not be familiar to the audience. In other cases, the ceremony may be obscure, or so unfamiliar to the audience as to be unrecognizable (2015, p.55).

The performing arts can be an opportunity for audiences to experience Indigenous culture for the first time. Allyson Green explains, "Art is a particularly useful discursive and ideological space where the possibilities of decolonial relationships can be imagined, in spite of the coloniality-of-power" (2019, p.8). Perhaps these shared experiences inspire further curiosity about Indigenous and settler relations in Canada, and maybe they inspire audiences to examine their ancestral histories. Performance communicates; it delivers a message, and how it is received by the audience is open to interpretation, which should be embraced.

Social activism has been an important mechanism for social change, but it also puts people at risk of being targeted for discrimination and abuse. Artists are not immune to discrimination, but there is a layer of protection that exists for artists when they are part of a community. There is an *ethic of care* that comes from working within the arts community. Marc Andre Fortin explains, "Twenty-first century social, economic, and political conditions produced by the long history of colonialism, globalisation, neoliberalism, and environmental injustice has necessitated radical responses that begin from spaces of ethical care" (2022, p.34). He elaborates that these spaces of ethical care come from Indigenous communities specifically, explaining:

In the era of post-residential schools in Canada, at a time when Indigenous communities are reclaiming the identities, stories, laws, lands, and bodies all taken from them, it is no surprise to see that the most radical modern social justice movements reshaping the social fabric of Turtle Island are happening from within Indigenous communities (2022, p.44).

Learning about the history of communication theory has significantly contributed to my understanding of communication as a field of study. I instinctively understood that there was a relationship between performance and communication, and I never realized the depth of this connection until now. This is important to me because I am embarking on a new journey as an Indigenous producer, producing art that communicates social change for Indigenous peoples in Canada. I have witnessed the profound impact of performance to heal and transform both audiences and performers, which is something social activism alone cannot provide. Inspiration

from the arts can offer hope, but it can also bring us to tears. Indigenous performance can ignite social change because it inspires empathy. In an overwhelmed and fatigued world, performance can entertain while also offering audiences and performers an opportunity to move toward understanding, compassion, expansion, and growth.

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Can You Feel That (BDE) Energy: The Mentally Ill Comedy of Pete Davidson

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Abstract

In August of 2014, the untimely death of Robin Williams inspired a mainstream conversation about mental illness, particularly as it was experienced by this beloved comedian who kept his decades-long mental health battle a secret from his adoring global fanbase. In 2023, memoirs by comedians Matthew Perry and Jennette McCurdy brought this issue back into the public eye, but once again in a roundabout way: like Williams, Perry's and McCurdy's previous comedy work had never let on to their struggles behind-the-scenes. In this article, I examine a contemporary comedian and actor who challenges these previously discrete realms of comedy and mental illness: Pete Davidson, who has made a name for himself in part by marrying his real-life mental health struggles with his celebrity persona. In films like Judd Apatow (2020)'s *The King of Staten Island* and television appearances like the Saturday Night Live musical number *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023), Davidson has successfully drawn on his mental health battle to create a form of humour I term 'mentally ill comedy'. In this article, I will draw on affect theory derived from Steven Shaviro (2010), Sianne Ngai (2012), and Lauren Berlant (2011) to consider how Davidson's mentally ill comedy provides a unique affective experience that specifically reaches out to those in his audience who can relate to his experiences with mental illness.

Keywords: Pete Davidson; mental health; affect theory; comedy; film studies

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On August 11, 2014, the news broke that 63-year old Robin Williams had died by suicide. While this tragedy now appears to have been a choice Williams made to end his battle with Parkinson's disease, his unexpected passing led to mass mainstream discourse on his long-term struggle with depression and the larger, pervasive link between American comedians, mental illness, and substance abuse. Almost a decade later in 2023, memoirs by comedians Matthew Perry and Jennette McCurdy about their own behind-the-scenes mental health struggles brought this conversation back to the mainstream. Indeed, looking at the careers of Williams, Perry, and McCurdy, their most famous comedic roles rarely, if ever, grappled with the topic of mental health, and certainly did not metatextually address their own real-life struggles. This division between private mental health battles and public comedic personas is now shifting, and in this paper, I will analyze the phenomenon of Pete Davidson, an openly mentally ill comedian and film star who has consciously incorporated his mental health problems into his celebrity persona both on- and off-screen. I will specifically analyze one of his feature films, *The King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020) (co-written by Davidson and based on events from his personal life), and his viral Saturday Night Live Barbie (Gerwig, 2023) parody skit, *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023).

Specifically, I seek to unpack the unique affective experience of Davidson's style of what I am terming 'mentally ill comedy'. This paper will begin with an analysis of Davidon's star persona in dialogue with Steven Shaviro (2010)'s conception of the "post-cinematic" celebrity, as well as Sianne Ngai (2012)'s theory of the "zany" aesthetic. In Ngai (2012)'s words, "zany" is "the aesthetic of nonstop acting or doing", a category that often emerges when we blur the lines between the affective experiences of "work" and "play" (7)—a phenomenon closely tied to the late stages of capitalism, and the resulting inability for many people to maintain a healthy work-life balance. I see Davidson as a post-cinematic celebrity who is also, in many ways, post-zany: in Apatow (2020)'s *The King of Staten Island* in particular, he is the figurative child of the zany characters Ngai (2012) analyzes, and represents a new, end-stage capitalist conception of the zany that incorporates the contemporary mental health crisis. I will then turn more directly to the mental health component of Davidson's star image, referring to Sigmund Freud (1905)'s work on jokes as connected to the unconscious, and Lauren Berlant (2011)'s idea of "cruel optimism." In particular, I will explain how the long-standing division between comedians' personal and professional lives is a form of cruel optimism, facilitating the illusion that mental illness does not have a tangible impact on the work of artists who suffer from it. Parallel to these lines of inquiry, I will draw on Eugenie Brinkema (2014)'s intervention into affect theory to conduct a formal analysis of how Davidson's body—specifically, his tattooed body—plays a key role in the larger affect of his mentally ill

comedy. Overall, I will argue that Davidson's comedic approach defies the cruelly optimistic idea that the personal and professional can be successfully separated by those suffering from mental illness in our era of end-stage capitalism.

Beginning with Davidson's unique star persona, he is unusual in the realm of male celebrities because his public image is so beholden to the female stars he has dated. Writing on Asia Argento's performance in *Boarding Gate* (Assayas, 2007), Shaviro (2010) explains that she is a "post-cinematic celebrity" who "inhabits movie and video screens in a far different way than older generation of actresses did" (54-55). He expounds upon how a classical star such as Greta Garbo is "an object of infinite desire" whom we "worship"; and while a later classical star like Marilyn Monroe may not be quite so "transcendent", she "supplements her beauty" with her deft comedic skills, bringing her "aura down to earth" (55). Shaviro (2010) argues that Argento, by contrast, is no longer transcendent at all: "she is directly carnal, immediately present in the flesh . . . Argento collapses the seductive distance between star and audience, and instead offers us her own hyperbolic presence . . . Even her irony is too immediate, and too close for comfort" (55). It may seem strange to reference these actresses in a conversation about Davidson, but I see this movement of ever-decreasing transcendence occurring within the progression of Davidson's celebrity image.

Davidson joined the cast of Saturday Night Live when he was only 20 years old, and filled the show's role of "resident young person"—while also receiving praise for possessing advanced comedic experience for his young age (Vaziri, 2015). While Davidson found great comedic success on SNL, many people first heard of him when he began dating, and later became engaged to, pop singer Ariana Grande. The two shared a whirlwind 5-month relationship in 2018 that ultimately endowed Davidson with a permanent reputation for having BDE, or "big dick energy", inspired by a Tweet Grande wrote about Davidson (Hosie, 2020). Grande also references Davidson in her hit 2018 song "Thank U, Next", singing, "Even almost got married / And for Pete I'm so thankful." Later, in 2021, reality star and businesswoman Kim Kardashian appeared in an SNL skit with Davidson, and the two began dating shortly thereafter. They broke up nine months later, but not before the couple revealed via a social media post that Davidson had multiple tattoos referencing Kardashian, their relationship, and her children with ex-husband Kanye West (Lee, 2023). Similarly to Grande, West chose to reference Davidson in a song, but in much less favourable terms: his 2022 track "Eazy" (also featuring rapper The Game) includes the lines, "God saved me from that crash / Just so I can beat Pete Davidson's ass." Taken together, these romantic entanglements provide Davidson with an unusual form of celebrity aura. At face value, he hardly possesses the transcendence of a Garbo or a Monroe, but he becomes an "object" of, perhaps not "infinite", but certainly a *fascinated* form of "desire"

(Shaviro, 2010, 55) via the appeal he clearly held for two women considered to be among the most beautiful and successful in the world. The fact that West, himself a household name, saw Davidson as enough of a threat to name-drop him in a song only adds to the aura around Davidson.

Of course, I am arguing that Davidson is, like Argento and unlike Garbo and Monroe, post-cinematic: this comes about because, rather than attempting to build celebrity status on this ambivalent aura of desire, Davidson has adopted a self-deprecating approach that directly addresses the humorous elements of his popular public image. This is most evident in his SNL skit *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023), filmed a year after Davidson left SNL as a regular cast member. Serving as a parody of the Ryan Gosling musical number *I'm Just Ken* in the film *Barbie* (Gerwig, 2023), the musical number features Davidson singing lyrics like, "I'm just Pete / Anyone else I'd be a 3 / But I guess I'm hot for dudes in comedy / Cause it's an ugly industry"; "Can you feel that energy / That famous big [dick] energy"; and "My dating life is not discrete / I generate tons of publicity for everything except my comedy." Here we can see that, as Shaviro (2010) characterizes Argento, Davidson "is self-demystified, self-consciously performative, and all too fully there" (56). Anyone who has engaged with such social media-derived humour like the "BDE" meme must, while watching this skit, confront the fact that Davidson is fully aware of everything people are saying about him—and he seems content leaning into the absurdity of it all. As a film star, Davidson's appeal is post-cinematic in a similar, yet new way from Argento: he not only transcends the traditional allure of celebrity, but also earns much of his mainstream recognizability from the drama surrounding his personal life rather than from his professional comedic accomplishments.

On a formal level, *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023)'s mise-en-scène copies the bright pink and blue hues of Gerwig (2023)'s film, casting Davidson in the same pop nostalgic light as original *I'm Just Ken* star Ryan Gosling. There is one critical difference, however: Davidson's body. In Gosling's original musical performance, he wears a fur coat with no shirt underneath, teasing a muscular, perfectly toned chest. In Davidson's number, he wears a blue jacket, also with no shirt underneath, but it is not muscles the viewer notices: instead, Davidson displays the many tattoos gracing his chest. There are also shots of a shirtless Davidson, where again, his thin frame is recognizable primarily for the complex inked designs covering almost every inch of his skin. Significantly, these tattoos are the only element of Davidson's popular persona that go unmentioned in the lyrics of the musical number, and they have become a rare source of privacy in the star's personal life, as well: while his tattoos dedicated to Kardashian and her family were unveiled via social media, recent pictures of Davidson suggest that he has had all of the tattoos removed without

publicly acknowledging this decision (Lee, 2023). The tattoos also reinforce Davidson's point that he is visually distinct from most other male comedians ("I guess I'm hot for dudes in comedy"), who rarely have such an extensive array of tattoos, and if they do, they do not dress in a way that accentuates them. For these reasons, I see the visual emphasis on Davidson's chest tattoos throughout *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023) as serving a similar affective function to Marion's tear-that-may-not-be-a-tear after her death in Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960), as discussed by Brinkema (2014).

Brinkema (2014)'s intervention into affect theory centers around the famous close-up of Marion's face after she is murdered in the shower, a close-up that reveals a bead of water in the corner of Marion's eye that could be either a tear, or just a conveniently placed droplet of water from the still-running showerhead (2). This maybe-tear impresses upon Brinkema because, "It comes from nowhere and advances nothing": Marion is dead, meaning that the tear no longer meaningfully connects either to Marion's past emotional state or to her nonexistent future emotions (17). It has nothing of apparent affective value to communicate to the viewer, and yet, it was committed to celluloid in what would become one of cinema's most iconic images. Brinkema goes on to explain that, "Such a tear that does not drop but folds points to a subjectless affect, bound up in an exteriority, uncoupled from emotion, interiority, expressivity, mimesis, humanism, spectatorship, and bodies" (45). This summarizes her larger aim to shift affect theory from a phenomenological project to one of formal analysis, as, in her view, current work in affect theory reveals "far more about being affected than about affects" (32). So how might we go about reading Davidson's tattoos as a "subjectless affect"? In I'm Just Pete (Patrick, 2023), their presence complicates the viewer's understanding of Davidson as a comedian and film star, visually aligning him much more with celebrities like white rapper Post Malone; nonetheless, there is no narrative acknowledgement of, or explanation for, these tattoos. They are simply *there*, a fact of Davidson's visual presence, like Marion's maybe-tear, that lacks a conventional affective process of cause (the viewer does not know where either the tattoos or the 'tear' came from) and effect (while the viewer is aware of the tattoos and the 'tear', neither of them advance the narrative or the viewer's affective experience of it).

Turning now to the aesthetic dimensions of *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick 2023), the skit carries a close association to camp, serving both as a portrait of failure and as a parody of a musical number from one of the most financially successful movies ever released. I argue, however, that this skit is a better representation of what Ngai (2012) describes as the aesthetic category of the zany. She explains that, while there are similarities between camp and zaniness, there is a crucial difference: "while camp thus converts the pain of failure and loss into victory and enjoyment, zaniness

highlights its own inability do this; indeed, the desperation and frenzy of its besieged performers, due to the precarious situations into which they are constantly thrust, point to a laborious involvement from which ironic detachment is not an option" (12). In essence, camp allows both performer and viewer to detach themselves from the aesthetic's inherent, underlying sense of discomfort, while the zany traps the performer—and sometimes the viewer as well—in that exact affective experience of unease. Indeed, while Davidson's comedy dips into irony, he is not detached: he is joking about his own life and career, and as noted previously, is "all too fully there" (Shaviro, 2010, 56). While the skit is comedically successful, the "pain of failure and loss" remains all too present for many viewers—an issue I will return to shortly when we discuss cruel optimism. For now, I want to outline Ngai's (2012) zany affects and how these relate to Davidson, particularly his film *The King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020).

Along with the zany, Ngai (2012) identifies the cute and the interesting as forming a triad of aesthetic categories which are "best suited for grasping how aesthetic experience has been transformed by the hypercommodified, information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism" (1). Of these three aesthetics, the zany is the one most associated with comedy (2), and "more specifically evokes the performance of affective labor—the production of affects and social relationships—as it comes to increasingly trouble the distinction between work and play" (7). Ngai (2012) references Jim Carrey's titular character in *The Cable Guy* (Stiller, 1996) as an example of the zany, serving as a hyper-competent, hyper-active blue collar worker who we, as viewers, "can only enjoy—if we do in fact enjoy it or her—at a safe or comfortable distance" (9). This sense of distance is critical to Ngai (2012)'s conception of the zany, a category that both depicts the plight of and potential impending harm to the overworked worker, while also "foreclose[ing] identification" with the worker (10). In *Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020), I view Davidson's character as a post-zany character, the son of a more conventionally zany character type who, now deprived of his father, must develop new approaches to coping with the demands of end-stage capitalism.

In the film, Davidson plays Scott, the son of a firefighter who died in a hotel fire when Scott was just a child. Scott grew up watching his mother idealize his late father, but when he gets to know some local firefighters who worked with his father, he sees quite a different picture: his father was a chaotic, cocaine-addicted man who was nonetheless entirely dedicated to his work, running in to try and save lives even when his colleagues believed the situation to be hopeless. While we only hear of Scott's father through these brief verbal anecdotes, he clearly fits the profile of Ngai (2012)'s zany; Scott, on the other hand, offers up a clear contrast. He is a 24-year old stoner

who never graduated high school and has no steady employment, leading multiple characters throughout the film—his mother, sister, best friend—to express frustration over his co-dependency on them. Before leaving for college, for example, Scott's younger sister Claire chastises him, saying, "All anyone does is worry about you. I was ignored my entire childhood cause of you . . . You don't get to act crazy your whole life just cause dad died, okay? At least you got to know him." Scott retorts, "Well, you're lucky you didn't get to know him, okay? Cause that's why you're almost normal. If you'd got to know him you would've known that he was like, the fucking coolest guy ever and that would've ruined the rest of your life." Claire immediately shifts gears, asking if Scott plans to get a job, to which he brings up his long-time dream of opening a restaurant that doubles as a tattoo parlour.

Here we return to the significance of tattoos, relevant both narratively and formally within *Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020). Narratively, Scott is a burgeoning tattoo artist who regularly uses his friends as "human sketchbooks" to practice his art; however, when we see Scott's tattoos, there is a clear metatextual dimension to them because they are also Davidson's real-life tattoos. While arguing with Claire, Davidson is filmed in medium close-up, wearing a semi-transparent white t-shirt that partially reveals the tattoos covering his chest and leaves his tattooed arms bare. While the scene is focused on the dialogue between the two siblings, Davidson occasionally clenches his shoulders and raises his slender arms, drawing greater attention to his body and the artwork covering his skin. Writing again on Marion's tear, Brinkema (2014) states that it, "is indifferent to its *from* and indifferent to its for, and therefore is inscrutable to existing work on affectivity" (36). This visual emphasis on Davidson's tattoos thereby supports my conception of mentally ill comedy via its inscrutability: like this category of comedy itself, Davidson's tattoos are an enigma, their real-life existence on Davidson's skin denying them a conventional, fictionally-derived affective context within the film.

Returning to the narrative context of this scene, two issues are at play. Firstly, Scott is resolutely inactive, unemployed, and banking on a dream of entrepreneurialism that everyone around him argues is a bad idea (as Scott's mother's new boyfriend puts it, "Getting a tattoo is like, uh, it's a medical procedure. You don't want to go to the hospital and order supper."). Secondly, Scott's inactivity directly stems from his trauma over losing his father. As he later explains to the firefighters, "You don't understand, my mom, my mom tells me all these stories about how much [my dad] was like a saint and all that shit . . . You don't understand the amount of pressure I'm under thinking this guy's perfect." Scott's father has been idealized as a perfect man, worker, husband, father—how can Scott possibly live up to this, particularly given that he struggles with chronic physical and mental health

issues? Ngai (2012) writes that "for all its spectacular displays of laborious exertion, the activity of zaniness is more often than not destructive; one might even describe it as the dramatization of an anarchic refusal to be productive" (12). In this film, we see evidence that it is this very "anarchic refusal to be productive" that characterizes the mental health crisis of end-stage capitalism.

Indeed, rather than exhibiting hyperactivity, Scott operates on a slower sense of temporality than everyone around him. In the same argument with Claire referenced earlier, she tells Scott, "You know, you gotta get your shit together. Time is passing by very quickly." Scott responds, "That's why I smoke weed all the time, okay? It slows it all down." Importantly, Scott's marijuana use is not simply recreational: we later learn he has Crohn's disease, which Davidson is afflicted with in real life, and he has stated in interviews that he could not perform comedy without the medicinal use of marijuana to manage his pain (Danko, 2016). At one point, Davidson did try to wean off of marijuana, believing it was detrimental to his mental health; but he was later diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), and discovered that the negative symptoms he was attributing to weed were actually coming from his BPD (Todd, 2021). While Davidson's character Scott does not have BPD, he is said to struggle with Attention-Deficit Disorder, a mental disorder whose more destructive symptoms can also potentially be mitigated through the medicinal use of marijuana ("Medical Cannabis"). In this way, Scott's potential for zaniness is subdued because of his physical and mental health conditions, as well as his chosen treatment for them. This also, however, figures him as a more contemporary representation of the zany in an era where chronic stress and resulting 'burnout' is the new normal in the contemporary workforce.

The most critical difference in Davidson's version of the zany, however, is that he is no longer a figure held at a distance: rather, he is all too relatable to many consumers of his content. Reading informal comments on social media about *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023), I was interested to see how many people related to Pete's self-deprecating remarks about his battles with mental illness and addiction; yet, there was also a smaller subset of people who were disquieted by the skit, worrying that Davidson's apparent lackadaisical attitude to his struggles with mental illness and addiction might soon end in a tragic death. Their fears are not without cause: the end of the skit features a gag of Davidson and Barbie crashing a car into Barbie's dreamhouse, an explicit reference to a 2023 incident in which Davidson crashed a car into a Beverly Hills home with his then-girlfriend Chase Sui Wonders in the passenger seat. He was ultimately charged with a misdemeanour for "reckless driving" (Bacardi, 2023). Combined with the skit's reference to Davidson's history of spending time in rehabilitation centres for drug abuse ("And out of the blue / Like three times a year /

When you least expect it / I go to rehab"), it is easy to see how—circling back to Ngai (2012)—some viewers cannot find enjoyment in the "pain of failure and loss" so clearly expressed in the skit.

Here, I would like to briefly draw on Freud to ground my conception of mentally ill comedy, particularly on why it appears to affect some viewers differently than others. In his work *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1905) claims, "If one has occasion as doctor to make the acquaintance of one of those people who, though not remarkable in other ways, are well known in their circle as jokers and the originators of many viable jokes, one may be surprised to discover that the joker is a disunited personality, disposed to neurotic disorders" (123). It is fascinating to see how, even this early-on in the history of psychiatry, Freud had such a strong understanding of comedy as deriving from neuroticism. Later in his (1905) book, he draws on his past work on dreams and the unconscious to argue for jokes as deriving from a highly similar psychological process as dreams: "Let us decide, then, to adopt the hypothesis that this is the way in which jokes are formed in the first person: a *preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once grasped by conscious perception*" (143). This "unconscious revision" is that pause in-between realizing that something has comedic potential, and actually recognizing it as a joke. My hypothesis is that, in the case of mentally ill comedy, the outcome of this unconscious revision is greatly dependent on whether the recipient of the humour is themselves mentally ill. This is not to say that no mentally healthy person could find humour in Davidson's style of comedy, or that no mentally ill person could find it discomforting, but rather that the sense of relatability that was so predominant in many responses to a work like *I'm Just Pete* (Patrick, 2023) largely derives from an affective connection born out of shared mental health struggles.

This finally brings us to Berlant (2011) and cruel optimism. Berlant (2011) explains that, "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing . . . These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (1). I argue that the longstanding tradition for comedians to hide their mental health struggles in their comedic works is a perfect example of cruel optimism. While the goal of this is, of course, to keep comedy light and away from such 'dark' topics as depression and addiction, there are now many examples of how this effort can eventually become cruel. Returning to the tragedy of Robin Williams, for instance, even one of his lightest, funniest, and most family-friendly ventures, *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus, 1993), is now shadowed by recent cast reunions where the child stars of the film lament the loss of

a beloved father figure. In Williams' case, a more public acknowledgement of his mental health battle during his life would likely not have saved his life; but it may have lessened the shock for many fans who, in the wake of his death, became aware of how disconnected his public and private lives really were. There is now a widespread sense that he sacrificed his own mental wellbeing to make others happy, which effectively shatters a fantasy many fans held of who Williams really was.

Indeed, our modern era is full of shattered fantasies that nonetheless live on as crudely transformed cruel optimisms. Berlant (2011) muses, "Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies . . . when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds?" They later continue, "The fantasies that are fraying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy" (2-3). This connects closely to the aesthetic of the zany, bound up in an ideal of never-ending work that becomes troubled in a world where many struggle even to find a job. Coming back to Davidson, his work is notably devoid of cruel optimism: he is born out of failed cruel optimism, and his comedic style repeatedly shatters every fantasy viewers might try to foster about him. He is uncomfortably *there*, disquietingly present—and thereby forces us to perceive our present, an act Berlant (2011) claims is always "affective": "the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else . . . If the present is not at first an object but a mediated affect, it is also a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now" (4). Mentally ill comedy is a style of humour that forces us to confront this "temporal genre" and become affectively aware of our present moment, a moment where all the theories of late capitalism are undergoing transformation into new forms relevant to end-stage capitalism. Whether viewers choose to accept the shattered fantasy or seek to transform it into their own personal cruel optimism is, ultimately, up to them to decide.

I will now close with what is, to me, the most comical exchange in *Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020), and which I see as encapsulating Davidson's mentally ill comedic persona. Attending a baseball game with a group of firefighters, Scott is offered a hotdog, which he declines, explaining that he has Crohn's. One firefighter asks him what Crohn's is, and Scott replies, "It's like when the lining of your stomach is all messed up, so it makes you shit all the time." Scott is chastised for over-sharing, and he responds casually, "I'm just trying to spread awareness." Davidson's rise to fame has been a storied one, and it may be true that his personal life has tended to overshadow his comedic achievements; however, when he does get to work, there is no doubt that he spreads awareness of mental illness, and offers us an affective

experience of what it means to live through an era where everything is chronic, none of it is good, and even cruel optimism is becoming harder and harder to sustain.

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Melancholy and Inscrutability: Affects Surrounding Asian American History

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Abstract:

Feelings change how we interact and perceive the world around us. Asian American history has been permeated with affects and feelings that shaped how Asian Americans were perceived and continue to be perceived in a white supremacist America. This paper aims to examine affect's relationship with Asian Americans and how certain cultural histories and memories have "stuck" to Asian Americans. Asian Americans have been branded as the "Other" due to white supremacy and cultural histories associated with it. The Yellow Peril ideology, a result of U.S nationalism and white supremacy, instilled fear into (white) citizens, portraying Asianness as a threat. The Model Minority Myth, on the other hand, pitted Asians against other people of colour in America by portraying Asians as the "good" minority that would not threaten white supremacy. These mythologies and discourses created a certain cultural history and memory of Asian Americans, manifesting specific emotions (socially moving) and affects. Melancholia and inscrutability can operate as forms of resistance against the existing affects about Asian Americans. Melancholia is defined as a death that is continuously mourned, and this paper looks at how assimilation causes melancholia. Inscrutability operates as a form of resistance by the refusal to be affected by previous affects and cultural memories for Asian Americans.

Keywords: Asian American history; affect theory; resistance; inscrutability; melancholia

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Introduction

Ahmed (2004), in her work The Cultural Politics of Emotions, says that feelings become "social presence rather than self-presence" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). Meaning that emotions and feelings can be socially constructed – feelings can change how we interact with and perceive the world around us. Not only that, but emotions can be social and cultural practices rather than a psychological being. Ahmed (2004) further proves this with her example of the bear – and how the bear has an image that is feared based on "cultural histories and memories" (p. 7). Therefore, when certain groups of people are associated with specific histories and memories, they invoke certain affects. This is then related to "stickiness" – how "feelings may stick to some objects and slide off others" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 8). When these feelings "stick" to objects, the objects then become saturated with affect as "sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 11). Sticking, according to Ahmed (2004), is dependent on past histories and associations, which then "work" together (via concealment) and move around all around us (p. 13). This paper aims to examine affect's relationship with Asian Americans and how certain cultural histories and memories have "stuck" to Asian Americans. Asian Americans have been branded as the "Other" due to white supremacy and cultural histories associated with it. The Yellow Peril ideology, a result of U.S nationalism and white supremacy, instilled fear into (white) citizens, portraying Asianness as a threat. The Model Minority Myth, on the other hand, pitted Asians against other people of colour in America by portraying Asians as the "good" minority that would not threaten white supremacy and as "robotic laborers whose social function revolves around economic efficiency, hard work, and professional success at all costs" (Huang, 2022, p. 12), which was effective for neoliberal capitalism. Eng and Han (2018) state that Asian Americans are a "split subject" – they exhibit a "faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective belonging" (p. 12) while sitting with the fact that they are marginalized groups in a white supremacist society, and therefore are deprived of certain privileges. Therefore, these mythologies and discourses created a certain cultural history and memory of Asian Americans, manifesting specific emotions (socially moving) and affects. I have chosen to focus on Asian Americans rather than the Asian diaspora as a whole because I believe that U.S nationalism and white supremacy play a role in the affects found in this paper. My positionality plays an important role in this paper – as a Korean-Canadian, I have first-hand experience on navigating North America as an Asian person. Although U.S nationalism has not played a role in my life as much as an Asian American, white supremacy still plays a large role in my life. The affects I will be focusing on are melancholia and inscrutability, and I argue that these affects

can become coping mechanisms as well as forms of resistance under a white supremacist society. Not only that, but I also hope to explore how these affects shape Asian Americans and our relationship to the world around us.

Assimilation and Melancholia

Asian Americans are thought to not have a "legitimate" culture under white supremacy and U.S nationalism compared to whiteness (Huang, 2022, p. 3). Huang further explains this in the following quote:

> Depicted as ghostly, inconsequential, or forgotten, Asian American history, politics, and culture are often discounted as lacking real content. If there is no public recognition of Asian American history, politics, or culture, there can be no common ground on which violence and injustice, let alone grief, healing, and care, among Asian Americans are discussed. (p. 12).

Melancholia in Asian Americans is a result of trying to assimilate but are unable to because of the cultural histories and memories surrounding Asian Americans and the "stickiness" of Otherness. The process of assimilation has become "a negotiation between mourning and melancholia" (Eng & Han, 2018, p. 60). Melancholia, according to Freud (as cited in Eng & Han, 2018) is "pathological precisely because it is a mourning without end" (p. 36). When one mourns, they replace the feeling of loss with something new. Mourning allows us to replace our loss with a new object, by declaring the previous object as "dead" but melancholia does not allow us to invest in new objects because we are stuck on resolving the object and cannot fully declare it "dead." Melancholia places you in a perpetual feeling of loss and mourning because you are unable to replace this feeling of loss. For Asian Americans, trying to assimilate and become a part of the United States is a continuous struggle. We will never be fully accepted due to our "foreignness," but we are unable to declare our attempts at assimilation as "dead" due to what we have left behind in the process of immigration and assimilation, and the wish to be accepted. Therefore, Asian Americans, as both the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril, have never truly "belonged." Eng and Han (2018) say that understanding melancholia can help us understand the struggles behind racialization and discrimination, theorizing the day-to-day struggles and experiences with racial exclusion and discrimination. They also say that the failure to "blend in" with the melting pot of the United States as Asian Americans is less of a personal failure but

rather a result of structural and social issue – one that prevents us from truly "belonging."

American exceptionalism and the standards set for racialized people in the United States were built on the promotion of "self-governance and self-sufficiency" (Chun et al., 2024, p. 436). For example, Japanese internment camps were designed to "shock" Japanese Americans into "proving" their usefulness as members of the American nation (Chun et al., 2024). Chinese laborers helped build important infrastructures in America but was structurally excluded from being a part of America through legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Acts. However, American exceptionalism places Asian Americans under a lens of "colourblindness" not recognizing the legislative and structural issues that lead to racial mourning and melancholia, but rather blaming the failure to "assimilate" on the individual. The Model Minority myth is used to invoke this state of "colourblindness" on Asian Americanxs – if you have been able to succeed despite being racialized, then the colour of your skin really does not matter. However, the Model Minority myth forces Asians to be "successful" – if we are not successful, it is a fault of our own and not the structural and racial barriers that have been placed before us, and going as far as saying that we are not actually Asian Americans, but an "exception." The Model Minority myth is used to forget events of group discrimination in the name of "abstract equality and individual meritocracy." (Eng & Han, 2018, p. 48). The Model Minority myth, which is seen as a "positive" representation of Asian Americans that pit them against other racialized subjects in the United States, can be a form of "wounded attachment." The Model Minority myth is seen as "a model of social achievement and exceptionalism" (Eng & Han, 2018, p. 47). However, the problem with the Model Minority myth is that due to its image as a "positive" representation for Asian Americans, it attaches itself to Asian Americans, and we do not think of what it really means, and the liabilities associated with the Model Minority myth. This is then related to melancholia because melancholia is a constant state of mourning and loss – because we are attached to this "positive" image of ourselves, we are unable to "give up" on it and attach ourselves to a new object. We are also unable to "give up" trying to become accepted in a white-centered American society, since we live in it and must face it everyday. It is not so easy to "give up" on "belonging" when we are surrounded by needing to "belong" constantly.

Melancholia in Asian Americans is caused by the "inbetweenness" of being Asian American. Eng and Han (2018) talk about immigration as a state of mourning – "when one leaves one's country of origin — voluntarily or involuntarily — one must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract" (p. 44). Therefore, when we

leave our "home" countries behind, we are mourning what we have lost. In order to "get over" this loss and leave it at "mourning," we must replace our loss with a new object, in this case, our "Americanness." However, due to the unacceptance of Asianness in a white-centered society and our racialized selves, Asian Americans are never able to leave their experiences of immigration at just "mourning" – it festers into melancholia. Melancholia is a result of the "inbetweenness" of being Asian American. Assimilating, in the dictionary, is defined as "to absorb into the cultural tradition of a population or group" or "to make similar" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Assimilation, in an American context of white supremacy and U.S nationalism, is a practice of "conversion" to American values and traditions. However, due to the racialization of Asian Americans, we will never fully "convert" to Americanness. Therefore, to find a sense of belonging and remedy this idea of conversion and assimilation, Asian Americans try to "marry" the two cultures. However, this marriage causes melancholia. Although this marriage is our attempt at assimilation, it is rejected by white supremacy, which is the reason we were having to have this "marriage" and "inbetweenness" in the first place.

One of the ways that the "inbetweenness" and melancholia can manifest itself is through filial piety by Asian American children. Filial piety is practiced in Asian cultures and is a Confucian concept that children must "pay back" their parents for giving life to them by demonstrating service towards them (ScienceDirect, n.d.). Since filial piety is mostly an Asian concept, it may be difficult for Asian Americans, who have "left" the traditions of their Asianness behind in their home countries, to practice it in a white-centered America. One of the case studies in the text by Eng and Han (2018) struck me deeply through its portrayal of filial piety and its relationship to melancholia. The case study talked about Elaine, a university student that has "inherited" her mother's depression and melancholia. Elaine's parents have left everything behind in South Korea to come to America. Elaine feels the astounding need to succeed (upholding the model minority myth) because she feels guilty that her parents would have had a much happier life if they had stayed in Korea and did not come to America for Elaine's sake. Eng and Han (2018) tell this story through a lens of melancholia – because Elaine's mom is depressed because of mourning the loss that can never be replaced (leaving what she knows of behind), Elaine "inherits" that depression and struggles with melancholia and loss herself. She feels guilty for "causing" this depression and melancholia when it is American society's lack of acceptance of Elaine and her family's Asianness. Melancholia then can manifest through the expectation of filial piety and the difficulty of "marrying" two cultures for Asian Americans. For Asian Americans (especially those that are of second generation and continued), they are unable to leave behind their "loss" and

continue on to new objects because they are not accepted in a white supremacist society. However, at the same time, they do not have anything to go back to or to replace the "loss" that the unacceptance causes – they have left behind their "home" cultures, placing them in a perpetual state of mourning, which is melancholia. As mentioned before, Asian Americans are considered "split subjects". They not only have to deal with being Othered but accept the fact that if they do become "accepted" in a white supremacist society, they are becoming okay with the fact that they are joining a racist society – one that has caused loss and mourning in them before. Asian Americans, then, become the "creation of a subject dead to his or her desires" (Eng & Han, 2018, p. 46). Melancholia, then, becomes a form of coping strategy because it explains our "inbetweenness".

Inscrutability and Being "Alive"

Inscrutability has been used as a "powerful orientalist discourse" to center whiteness and to put Asianness as something "impenetrable or unfathomable to investigation; quite unintelligible, entirely mysterious" (Huang, 2022, p. 2). Inscrutability, according to Huang (2022), is important to study in the context of Asian Americans because not only does it situate the racialization that Asian Americans face, but also for "interdisciplinary studies of race, gender, sexuality, and minoritarian aesthetics that may rely on the work of Asian American studies as an unspoken epistemic limit" (p. 13). Furthermore, inscrutability is related to animacies and being "alive." Chen (2012) says that animacies "has been described variously as a quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" (p. 2). The relationship between animacies and inscrutability can be seen in the following quote by Huang (2022):

> In an American racial landscape, Asian Americans present a different kind of problem than being "too much alive" but rather not lively enough. The charge of not being lively, however, carries its own emotional, psychological, and political stakes, such that the very liveliness of Asian American culture and humanity is questioned. (p. 19)

As stated in the quote, Asian Americans are seen as not "alive" enough. The politics of being alive or "moved" is incorporated into inscrutability and how Asian Americans are seen in the white supremacist society. Chen (2012) talks about the "affective state of being 'animated'" can mean the bare minimum of being in an affective condition, but being racialized, twist being "animated" and therefore alive,

as "overemotional" (p. 11). This then brings up the question of how much space racialized groups can take up in a white supremacist society. When they do "take up space", how they take up space is mediated by white supremacy. Asian Americans are told to only take up space through the lens of the Yellow Peril or the Model Minority myth, both ideologies that benefit white supremacy. However, inscrutability can be seen as a form of resistance to this. This is further supported by Huang (2022), who says that Asian inscrutability "disturbs the emotionality of political expression" (p. 19). Asian inscrutability, as a form of resistance, allows Asian Americans to reclaim how the affects surrounding them will be moved in a white supremacist society.

Before I dig into how Asian inscrutability is a form of resistance and a way to "take up space" for Asian Americans, I would like to explore the relationship between inscrutability, white benevolence and animacy. White benevolence plays a role in Asian American inscrutability because Asian Americans, as the "Othered" subject in the United States, must rely on white invitation and benevolence to be "accepted." This "acceptance", however, is dependent on what Asians can provide as a service to whiteness, placing Asians in a constant place of servitude under white supremacy. Historically, according to Chun et al. (2024), white benevolence has started within the white upper/middle class. Not only did they benefit from this "benevolence" through exploitative immigration and labour policies, which Asian Americans had no power over, but these "benevolent" white people could be seen as "enlightened" compared to the non-benevolent "lower" white society. White benevolence plays a role in inscrutability because it is through white benevolence that Asian Americans have been seen as "malleable." Being malleable is an important theme in affects surrounding Asian Americans not only due to white benevolence that determine whether we are worthy to take up space, but also because our refusal to mould to these dynamics and therefore becoming inscrutable and operate as a form of resistance. Asian Americans have to perform for "elite" (white) eyes through the Model Minority myth. When Asian Americans are offered "provisional status" in white-dominant institutions, despite the lack of political and historical representations (Muñoz, as cited in Huang, 2022, p. 186), it is because they are "performing" a certain type of servitude and therefore is being affected. By being inscrutable, impenetrable and refusing to be affected, Asian Americans are able to decide how they take up space in a white supremacist society by reclaiming the affects surrounding us. For example, Asianness, under the gaze of white supremacy, is seen as a threat. Ahmed (2004) talks about how "hate" can be associated with "love". The "hate" for Others that occurs under white supremacy is framed as a result of the "love" that they have for their nation. This is important

because as Ahmed (2004) says, "the replacement of one word for an emotion with another word produces a narrative" (p. 13). Chen (2012) in their work, talks about how Asians were seen as "invaders" through the lead toy panic. Asians being associated with bioterrorism is a reoccurring concept, COVID-19 pandemic further accelerating these ideas. The association of Asians with bioterrorism is seen as especially frightening for white supremacy because it is this idea that when something is attached to human producers, even if the threat is far away, a disease can still manifest, even though "even if its condition is not (even transitively) communicable" (Chen, 2012, p. 169). Therefore, as Chen (2012) said about lead, Asianness could be "like any toxin, perhaps especially because it is not alive, it can be detached and reattached to diverse cultural and biological forms" (Chen, 2012, p. 187). By reclaiming the inscrutability that was once used to evoke fears against Asian Americans, the inscrutability can attach itself to certain narratives.

Inscrutability can be used as a form of resistance for Asian Americans through the refusal to be affected. An article by Chun et al. (2024) details an incident that happened in Napa Valley, California in the United States where Chinese-Filipino American Jordan Eli Chan and her family were hurled racist remarks at them by a white man, Michael Lofthouse, in a restaurant. Although the family was "defended" by the white server, Genica Cochran (signifying "white benevolence"), it is worthy to examine the affects surrounding the scene. First, the scene was made possible to be viewable through digital platforms – Chan herself has uploaded the video of her and her family being racially harassed onto social media. And although on the surface it seemed like "justice was served" through the involvement of Cochran, the benevolent white defender, the truth could not be further. Chan (like most women of colour online) was forced to deactivate her social accounts due to the outpouring of harassment, while Cochran was given a GoFundMe by a viewer where people raised "tips" for this benevolent white defender. The ones that benefited from this situation – the white server and the platforms on which Chan uploaded her video on and circulated around, continue a narrative of a specific power dynamic, one of white supremacy and platform imperialism. However, it is worthy to examine how Chan acted in the video. Instead of coiling away, Chan "stood up" to Lofthouse, saying, "What? Say that again!". This reaction, according to Chun et al. (2024) is a refusal to be affected. This surprise, disengagement, disgust and most importantly, disaffection – are states that "complete the circuit of witnessing and estrange racism as fundamentally alien" (p. 444). Therefore, Chan's reaction and refusal to be affected places racism in as something non-normative, a contrast to everyday practices of racism and microaggressions that occur when Asians are put under specific affects, such as fear. Furthermore, the documentation of racism, which is

shown through the video that Chan has recorded, "estranges and exposes racism as a performance that the offender cannot disavow and make disappear with an apology" (p. 445). This "refusal to be viewed as affected precludes group affiliation and constitutes a refusal of amplification" (Chun et al., 2024, p. 444). By this refusal to be affected and therefore inscrutability, Chan is "taking up space" and therefore being "alive." Not only that, but Chan is also not putting herself in this box that was created by white supremacy, and therefore these manuscripts of how she should act under "normative" ways. Chan, in her reaction, has become "alive" and forms a resistance to the inscrutability that determines her as not "lively enough." Although in her reaction she is taking up space, the results of the circulation of this video, still uphold certain narratives. Therefore, Asian inscrutability can be seen more as a coping mechanism than a structural "fix." In order for a structural "fix" to be possible, existing narratives and cultural histories of Asian Americans must be reset – and therefore inscrutability offers a band-aid solution to the affects that have already permeated Asian American history. There is no perfect solution that places Asian inscrutability as the perfect "fix," but rather a structural reset of dismantling white supremacy must be done.

Conclusion

Melancholia and inscrutability are affects that surround the cultural histories and memories of Asian Americans. These affects work as coping mechanisms for Asian Americans living under white supremacy. Melancholia and inscrutability, as affects, place Asians in forms of resistance and negotiation because under a white supremacist society, Asians are seen as "forever foreigners." Melancholia, the state of perpetual mourning, is a coping mechanism for Asian Americans because we are attempting to understand that we will never be fully accepted in American society and in our "home" countries. The inbetweenness that causes melancholia is an affect that "sticks" to us and our attempts at assimilation. Not only that, but melancholia also explains the Asian American experience, our mourning and how we cope with the affects that "stick" to us. Meanwhile, inscrutability operates as a coping mechanism because it can be reclaimed into a form of resistance. Historically, Asian Americans were seen as inscrutable and therefore a "threat." Asian Americans are also seen as "not lively enough" and therefore devoid of humanity. However, by refusing to be molded under white supremacy and therefore in a place of servitude under it, Asian Americans are taking up space and reclaiming that inscrutability, and placing racism as something non-normative. In conclusion, melancholia and inscrutability are both affects that not only operate as coping mechanisms and

forms of resistance for Asian Americans but can explain the Asian American experience under America that is built on white supremacy.

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Understanding Labour Migration Through Emotion and Power

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Abstract

Discussions of migration and labour often focus on the physical environments that migrant workers experience in their host countries, overlooking the affective lives and realities of migrant labourers. Drawing on affect theory helps uncover how affect influences migration and shapes the experiences of migrant labourers. Discursive affective elements play a crucial role in constructing the image of migration within public discourse. Host countries receive significant benefit from migrant workers in the form of low-wage, skilled labour and economic profit. Therefore, in the context of the American Dream, discussing affect exposes how the American Dream is not a simple reality but a construct engineered by the state through the use of affective appeals to entice labour migration. Similarly, state institutions utilize the same affective strategies in the construction of the "American Dream" as they do in the "othering" of migrants, positioning how certain bodies are privileged and recognized within the host country, while others are marginalized or excluded. In framing migrants as a threat to national security and cohesion, states are able to justify exclusionary policies and practices related to border control and regulation. Overall, this paper discusses how state institutions simultaneously utilize affective strategies to both promote migration through the American Dream and marginalize migrants, serving to justify exploitation.

Keywords: Affect; affective economies; migration; cruel optimism; biopolitics

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Introduction

In contemporary discussions of labour migration, exploitation has emerged as a defining feature of the lived migrant experience, shaped by the social, political, and cultural framing of the 'migrant' through affect. By applying affect theory to the context of labour migration, the paper discusses the emotional dimensions of migration experiences and the ways in which affect influences the construction of borders and the promotion of migration, as well as, the discursive narratives surrounding migration and its regulation. Host countries receive significant benefit from migrant workers in the form of low-wage, skilled labour and economic profit. Therefore, these countries construct perceptions of opportunity and success in order to promote labour migration. Enticed by the allure of economic prosperity and upward mobility, key notions central to the American Dream, individuals migrate to the US and are often left disillusioned when confronted with the precarious environments that awaits them in the US. However, the reality of migration often involves confronting systemic injustices, discrimination, as well as, precarious living and working conditions that undermine the attainment of these aspirations. State institutions and the media have been able to effectively utilize affect as a tool of legitimization of exclusionary practices, promoting the marginalization of migrants. Migrant workers face continued emotional and physical decline as a result of exploitative conditions such as unsafe working conditions, wage theft, or a lack of legal protections. This paper will discuss the role of affect in shaping the discourse and realities of migration, specifically, its intersection with power, biopolitics, and narratives of inclusion and exclusion.

Construction of the American Dream

The concept of the American Dream has become synonymous with ideals of freedom, opportunity, and individualism that are often considered by many to be quintessentially 'American.' Historically, the earliest use of the term "American Dream" can be traced back to a book published in 1931 titled, *Epic of America,* by James Adams (Cullen, 2003). In the book, Adams refers to the American Dream as one shared by the nation to provide for a better life for all citizens alike, regardless of their rank. Cullen (2003) discusses the American Dream as a central component of the national identity having become a widespread sentiment shared by "jubilant athletes following championship games, aspiring politicians on the basis of their candidacies, and businessmen achieving the ultimate goal of their enterprises," (p.5). Similarly, within the context of migration, the American Dream provides for an enticing objective. The United States, with its reputation as the standard of economic prosperity, has long been associated with the 'American Dream,' a narrative that

symbolizes the promise of upward mobility and success through hard work and determination. While not universal, the sentiment of the American Dream is widespread, reaching even those that reside outside the borders of the United States.

When discussing the construction of the American Dream, it is crucial to highlight the fact that host countries receive significant benefit from migrant workers in the form of low-wage, skilled labour and economic profit. As a result, they employ affective strategies to attract labour migrants, leveraging narratives of economic opportunity, social mobility, and cultural integration to entice migration. Incorporating Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of affective economies, these strategies are part of a broader system of emotional exchange, where desires and aspirations are circulated and commodified (Ahmed, 2014). Host countries actively cultivate and manage affective attachments to attract and retain migrant populations, framing migration as a mutually beneficial exchange to both, the migrant and the receiving country. From the late 19th century, through media, literature, and film, the United States has been able to frame cultural narratives to present itself as a land of opportunity and promise migrants the chance to improve their circumstances (Clark, 2003). The allure of economic advancement serving as a powerful incentive, draws individuals to seek employment opportunities in these countries.

Clarke (2003) discusses one example of such narratives present in the book titled, *The Americano Dream,* which centres around a Latino immigrant, who, through sheer hard work and determination, successfully rose to the top of one of the largest Hispanic advertising agencies in the United States. As a result, these stories promote the American Dream as an attainable goal where migrants without any significant educational or career backgrounds achieve success by taking low-end, low-paying jobs and working their way towards economic prosperity (Clarke 2003). What these stories often fail to convey is just how uncommon these success narratives are when considering the larger population of migrants. The majority of migrants encounter significant barriers that lead them into a cycle of labor exploitation (Clarke 2003). Instead of thriving, they often struggle to make ends meet, caught in a system that prioritizes profit over their well-being. As a result, the dominant narrative of successful migrants can create a misleading impression that achieving the American Dream is guaranteed and the norm, when in reality, many migrants struggle to navigate systemic barriers that hinder their progress.

Contemporary perceptions of the American Dream highlight significant criticisms for its failure to deliver on its' promises of economic prosperity and mobility. What once was a beacon of hope for the eventual payoff of work ethic, has now been marked with increasing skepticism. Wyatt-Nichol (2011) argues that the

ideal of the American Dream in which success is attainable through hard work and perseverance is increasingly at odds with the reality of growing class disparities. Systemic inequalities and entrenched social class structures create significant barriers to upward mobility for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Discrimination is a major factor limiting access to the American Dream for racial minorities as discriminatory practices limit access to resources in all aspects of life including education, employment, and housing. Therefore, this inequity in access to resources restricts racial minorities from opportunities for economic advancement (Wyatt-Nichol, 2011). As a result, the systemic inequity undermines the promise of the American Dream, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limited social mobility. Furthermore, the widening of the wealth gap and income inequality has significantly contributed to the weakening of the American Dream. The likelihood of children earning more than their parents has significantly declined over the past fifty years (Chetty, 2017). Individuals from lower income families now face more barriers in their attempt to achieve the American Dream due to the decline of income mobility. As a result, many Americans are now disillusioned with the idea of the American Dream and perceive it to be unattainable (Wyatt-Nichol, 2011).

While critiques of the American Dream expose issues limiting upward mobility, these criticisms have not significantly diminished the Dream's allure abroad (Bundalevska, 2023). Labor migration remains an enticing option for many individuals seeking to achieve economic prosperity, with the United States continuing to attract migrants who are drawn by the promise of the American Dream (Bundalevska, 2023). However, the lived experiences of migrants within the United States differ significantly from the idealized perception of the American Dream as they face economic precarity. Gurung, Amburgey, and Craig (2021) highlight the perception of the American Dream by Himalayan migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. They discuss how from the 1990s, labour migration to New York from Nepal have become more prominent due to the assumption of increased financial stability in the achievement of the American Dream. The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the economic stability of translocal Himalayan migrants as they faced job losses, lacking access to resources, and financial insecurity, challenging assumptions about migration within the context of the American Dream (Gurung, Amburgey, & Craig 2021). The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized migrant populations has led migrants to become disillusioned with the American Dream, highlighting that the promise of economic prosperity is not always attainable.

Cruel Optimism of Migration

Due to state construction of the American dream, migrants are often enticed by idealized visions of prosperity and opportunity as these constructed narratives provide powerful motivators for migration. For many migrants, the United States symbolizes the epitome of opportunity, playing into the cultural ideals of 'America' as a place where dreams can be realized. The affective appeal of the American Dream lies not only in its material rewards but also in its emotional resonance. The pursuit of the American Dream and other idealized visions of success represent not only a move for material improvement but also proves to be deeply personal and emotional in the ability of migrants to find self-discovery and fulfillment. Berlant's concept of cruel optimism provides a critical lens through which to examine the affective dimensions of migration, particularly in their pursuit of the American Dream (Berlant, 2011). Referring to the attachment to fantasies of the good life that are ultimately unattainable or unsustainable, cruel optimism states that individuals continue to invest in them as a way to cope with the challenges and uncertainties of everyday life (Berlant, 2011). The promise of the American Dream embodies the fantasies of upward mobility evoking feelings of hope among migrants. However, cruel optimism highlights the inherent contradictions and limitations of such aspirations. The pursuit of the American Dream often entails significant emotional labour and investment in narratives of success that may ultimately prove unattainable or unsustainable in the face of structural barriers and systemic inequalities.

Migrants continue to invest in the pursuit of the American Dream as a way to cope with the challenges and uncertainties of migration, seeking refuge in fantasies of a better life in the face of adversity. However, the reality of migration often involves confronting systemic injustices, discrimination, as well as, precarious living and working conditions that undermine the attainment of these aspirations. Despite their best efforts, migrants may find themselves trapped in cycles of exploitation and disenchantment, unable to fully realize the promises of the American Dream. The gap between the idealized vision of the American Dream and the realities of migration create a sense of disillusionment among many migrants, leading to feelings of betrayal and resentment. In the context of labour migration, labour exploitation takes a significant emotional toll on migrant workers, as they find themselves trapped in exploitative working conditions with limited recourse. Berlant suggests that even within relative wealth, individuals experience a pervasive attrition, a wearing down of the self amidst the routines of daily existence (Berlant, 2011). Often, migrant workers struggle to reconcile their aspirations with the harsh realities of their lived experiences. As a result, migrant workers face continued emotional and physical decline, experiencing a "slow death" as a result of exploitative conditions such as unsafe working conditions, wage theft, or a lack of legal protections (Berlant, 2011,

p.38). Despite the adversity that migrant workers face, many migrant workers persist in the face of exploitative conditions due to their deep attachments. The optimistic fantasy becomes central to their sense of self, fostering a potential sense of belonging alongside other migrants. Their choice to leave their home countries leads to feelings of having invested too much to give up these attachments, even when these very attachments contribute to the suffering they endure.

Racial discrimination and the othering of migrants has significant impacts on their well-being, contributing to their "slow death" as referenced by Berlant (2011). Torres, O'Conor, Mejía, Camacho, and Long, (2011) highlight the intersection of racial discrimination and mental health issues among Latino migrants in the US. Reflecting the general patterns emerging in labour migration and its relationship with the American Dream, Latino migrants come to the US in search of economic stability and career prospects. However, discriminatory practices in the workplace and systemic barriers in accessing healthcare resources result in trauma-related symptoms (Torres, O'Conor, Mejía, Camacho, & Long, 2011). Many report perceived these racist encounters as threatening and extremely stressful resulting in severe psychological harm. However, these interactions persist even in the migrants' attempts to receive medical treatment as individuals of colour were shown to receive lower quality healthcare (Torres et al., 2011). These challenges extend to mental health services, where cultural incompetency and language barriers further exacerbate the difficulties faced by Latino migrants. As a result of their experiences and limited recourse, many Latino migrants report experiencing daily psychological distress and lower quality of life (Torres et al., 2011).

Construction of Borders Through Affect

We see the very same affective strategies at play in the construction of the "American Dream" as we do in the 'othering' of migrants. When discussing the construction of borders, state institutions and the media have been able to effectively utilize affect as a tool of legitimization of exclusionary practices. Fear, xenophobia, and nationalism have been instrumental in shaping public sentiments and informing policy decisions. Ahmed's concept of affective economies highlights how nationalism and xenophobia are circulated and mobilized within discursive narratives surrounding migration, shaping the perception of migrants. Ahmed argues that emotions circulate within social spaces, shaping collective feelings and affecting individual subjectivities, reinforcing political structures (Ahmed, 2014). In her work on affective economies, Ahmed discusses the importance of language and the role it plays in shaping how emotions are expressed, shared, and circulated, highlighting the

emotional nature of nationalism and belonging. Nationalist discourse not only legitimizes the securitization of borders but also contributes to the marginalization and demonization of migrant populations. Ahmed's concept of the "sticky" nature of emotions emphasizes how affective attachments to the nation-state are produced and maintained through repeated acts of affirmation and recognition.

Kujawa (2022) discusses the concept of "affective governmentality" which reveals how the production and distribution of emotion is used to create, enforce, and preserve borders, drawing attention to the ways that affective narratives shape the development of power relations and identity (p.50). In their research, emotions are viewed as resources that can be mobilized by the state, as well as by non-state organizations and actors, through the production of certain narratives, the interpretation and application of legal norms, and the establishment of regulations (Kujawa, 2022). In this view, the concept of affective governmentality aligns with Ahmed's work on affective economies in their view of bordering practices as sites of affective regulation.

Discursive affective elements play a crucial role in constructing the image of migrants within public discourse. Migrants may be portrayed as either threats or assets, depending on the framing of their narratives. For example, they may be depicted as economic burdens draining resources from the host society, or as valuable contributors enriching cultural diversity and driving economic growth. The language used in media reporting or political discourse to describe migrants creates the narratives that will evoke emotions within the public and shape attitudes and responses towards migrants. By framing migrants as 'others' who are fundamentally different from the host population, policymakers and media outlets exploit fear and xenophobia to advance exclusionary policies and ideologies. Such narratives disproportionately impact non-white migrants as these narratives are predominantly rooted in racist sentiments. In their article, Ballinas (2016) highlights the importance of news media in shaping perceptions of racialized groups to the general public in the United States. Ballinas (2016) states that since the 1980s, media reporting of migrants in the US have closely associated of migration with illegality, racist sentiments, and government failure. As a result, a divisive narrative is established, leading to a separation between citizens and the perceived 'other.'

Similarly, xenophobia is mobilized to influence the discursive framing of migrants as it is deeply entrenched in societal attitudes and reinforced by political rhetoric. Manifesting as an aversion to 'outsiders,' it is fuelled by economic anxiety, cultural prejudice, and a perceived threat to national identity (Kujawa, 2022). Politicians are then able to increase restrictive immigration measures through

xenophobic sentiments which frame migrants as 'others' who undermine national unity and cohesion (Kujawa, 2022). Such narratives foster an 'us versus them' mentality and create a climate of suspicion and hostility towards migrant communities. When looking at the mobilization of xenophobic and nationalist sentiment, Ahmed's concept of affective economies underline the unequal allocation of emotional capital, exposing how some groups profit from the creation and dissemination of fear while others are shut out and ostracized (Ahmed, 2014). These narratives justify violence and exclusion against migrants, shifting the discourse away from responsibility to support those fleeing war, crisis, or poverty. Instead, the focus is placed on the need for protection from migrants, leading to policies such as border closures and heightened security measures. The hyper visibility of crimes committed by migrants further amplifies these narratives, fuelling public panic and enabling right-wing movements to mobilize against migrants. Voegle highlights how migration is increasingly framed as a security issue, mobilizing images of fear and associating refugee subjects with threats to security and economic survival (Voegle, 2019). This framing serves to justify heightened border controls, security measures, and exclusionary policies aimed at restricting the movement of migrants. By portraying migrants as dangerous and undesirable, these narratives perpetuate xenophobia and justify violence and discrimination against migrant populations.

Frank-Vitale (2020) discusses the construction of the American Dream and how the US government, specifically the Trump campaign, had utilized affect as a tool contributing to the othering of migrants. Trump's campaign capitalized on affective appeals of fear and resentment to mobilize support for restrictive immigration policies, portraying migrant workers and immigrants as threats to American jobs and cultural identity. As a result, the campaign was able to effectively tap into existing anxieties and insecurities among certain demographics of the population. This article highlights the role of affective economies in shaping public perceptions of immigration and influencing political outcomes, highlighting how emotional responses to immigration issues can override rational deliberation and lead to the embrace of nationalist agendas (Frank-Vitale, 2020).

Framing of Migrants and the Biopolitics of Migration

Ahmed highlights how emotions are relational, involving reactions or orientations toward objects, which in turn shape and are shaped by these affective encounters (Ahmed, 2014). Ahmed contends that emotions involve a form of reorientation, where the subject's affective response is directed toward the object, attributing the feeling to the encounter. The object of feeling is never simply before

the subject; rather, it is influenced by histories and contexts that inform the affective encounter. Ahmed states that, "fear shapes the surfaces of bodies in relation to objects," and thus, the body of the migrant now becomes an object of fear (2014, p.8). This understanding challenges traditional views of emotions as residing solely within subjects or objects, instead proposing that they are produced as effects of circulation within affective economies.

Schweiger (2021) highlights the construction of narratives of migrants within the framework of the 'civilized white state' versus the migrant framed as the 'other' (Schweiger, 2021, p.243). In this process of framing, migrants are viewed by the receiving society from a position of cultural superiority, often perceived to be in need of instruction on "civilized" values (Schweiger, 2021, p.243). This perception contributes to the construction of the migrant as the 'other,' positioning them in a lower social position while reinforcing the idea of the higher social position as the norm. In this construction of narratives, the receiving society, often represented by the 'civilized white state,' assumes a position of cultural and moral authority, portraying itself as the standard against which migrants are judged (Schweiger, 2021). Migrants, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, are depicted as lacking in cultural capital and in need of assimilation into the dominant cultural norms of the host society. This dynamic reinforces ideas of normality where the receiving society's values and practices are deemed superior and desirable, while those of the migrant are seen as deficient or deviant (Schweiger, 2021). This perception not only reinforces the power dynamics between the receiving society and migrants but also perpetuates stereotypes that marginalize migrant communities. Thus, migrants are positioned as outsiders who must conform to the dominant cultural norms to be accepted. Such narratives contribute to the exclusion of migrants from full participation in society and reinforce the social hierarchies that privilege the 'civilized' over the 'other' Overall, the construction of narratives of migrants within the framework of the 'civilized white state' versus the migrant as the 'other' reflects broader power hierarchies embedded within the societies of the host countries.

These narratives align with the concept of biopolitics which originated from Michel Foucault's work. Foucault argues that modern governance focuses on biopower, which regulates and regulates life itself (Puar, 2023). Biopolitics describes the processes through which states exercise power over the population's bodies, regulating their lives and determining their value based on social and political status. In his work, *Dividual Economies of Data and the Flesh*, Puar's discussion of how economies, both digital and physical operate at the level of dividuals, highlights the ways in which contemporary society commodifies not only data but also human bodies and experiences (2023). Puar discusses biopolitics in the concept of dividual

economies which refers to economies that operate at the level of 'dividual' units rather than treating individuals as a whole. In the context of flesh, it refers to the ways in which individual bodies are commodified and exploited (2023, p.409). While Puar did not specifically mention migrants, biopolitics becomes particularly relevant in contemporary discussions of migrant labour experience.

Within the context of migration, biopolitics manifests as the management and regulation of migrant bodies by state authorities. This includes policies and practices related to border control and regulation, all of which shape migrants' lives and experiences. The biopolitics of migration contributes to the normalization of certain norms and standards within society, often at the expense of marginalized migrant populations. This positions how certain bodies are privileged and recognized within the host country, while others are marginalized or excluded. Nation-states often employ biopolitical strategies to control the movement of people across borders, regulating who is allowed entry, who is deemed a citizen, and who is considered an outsider. The link between dividual economies and migration lies in the ways in which migrants are subjected to both, economic exploitation and biopolitical control. Migrant workers, for instance, experience precarious employment conditions, low wages, and exploitation by employers, while also facing surveillance, discrimination, and state violence.

Voegle (2019) explores the construction of narratives surrounding migration, particularly focusing on the intertwining of affective reactions and biopolitical power dynamics. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's analysis of emotions shaping individual and collective bodies, Voegle highlights how embodiment plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and responses to migration within society (2019). Voegle draws on Ahmed's analysis to emphasize how emotions shape individual and collective bodies, influencing perceptions and responses to migration within society. This understanding highlights the importance of affect in the operation of power, particularly in relation to biopolitics. Voegle emphasizes that the notion of precarity is central to these discursive narratives, referring to a system that strips protections from certain populations, rendering them as "lives that are not quite lives" or "wasted" and "disposable" (Voegle, 2019, p.124). As a result, there is an unequal attribution of value and capacity for emotion afforded to different lives, particularly within the context of migration. Voegle highlights how migration is increasingly framed as a security issue, mobilizing hate and fear to shape perceptions of those who migrate creating a justification for the violence towards and exploitation of migrants (Voegle, 2019). These narratives, as described by Ahmed, "stick" certain emotions and connections to specific bodies, reinforcing the perception of migrants as dangerous and undesirable (Ahmed, 2014, p.8). This construction of narratives

extends to how migration is perceived and felt within host countries, both in the sense of how migrants are perceived by the general public and how migrants experience the realities of migration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, affect proves to play a significant role in understanding the relationship of power, emotion, and migration. Through the conceptualization of affective economies, cruel optimism, and biopolitics, the paper discussed how emotions shape perceptions, narratives, and policies related to migration. By applying affect theory to the context of labour migration, the paper discusses the emotional dimensions of migration experiences and the ways in which affect influences the construction of borders and the promotion of migration, as well as, the discursive narratives surrounding migration and its regulation. Overall, this paper highlighted the importance of considering affect as a significant force in shaping the lived realities of migrants and the broader sociopolitical structures they navigate.

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In two places at once: The racialization of affective labour in the global call centre industry

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Abstract:

The rise of the outsourced call centre industry has proved lucrative for transnational corporations in a postmodern society, where affective labour is a dominant and productive force and work is fragmented across continents. This industry has established itself in countries in the Global South, where millions of workers are given the opportunity to engage in the information economy as a foundational labour force – engaging in forms of affective and intimate labour as they try to mediate the concerns of callers from the Global North. This literature review seeks to investigate the racialization of affective labour within the outsourced call centre industry, as workers seek to mediate the whims and wishes of their clients while upholding the illusion that they live and work next door. First, this review uses Hardt's framework for affective labour and Lee's conceptualization of affective capitalism to establish a historical context in which this industry and these labour processes exist. Ahmed's study of how hate flows between bodies through affective economies is then considered when looking at the tenuous relationship between racialized call centre workers and their callers and clients. These concepts are then used in conjunction with studies on the Philippine and Indian call centre industries to further examine how techniques like identity management and accent neutralization seek to erase the racialized nature of these workers to foster environments of familiarity for their callers

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Growing up in the Philippines, my parents taught me English before my own mother tongue as they had always planned to immigrate to Canada. Because of this, nobody has ever mentioned that I sounded like an immigrant – but nobody has ever mentioned that I had a strong connection to my home. Once I returned to the Philippines, my cousin asked me to speak English around her daughter, hoping that she could also pick up my antiseptic accent. While working at a call centre in Vancouver, I was always on edge while navigating phone calls. I was incredibly privileged by the fact that this centre is based in Canada, and that I was already embedded in the cultural values that my employer expects from me. My accent also meant that I could easily pass off as a Canadian, or someone from the West Coast if they had a trained ear. However, there is something unnerving in knowing that if I sounded just a bit different, I would be treated differently. While speaking to a client from the United States, they rejoiced – they were happy to speak to someone from North America for a change. I felt like an impostor.

Introduction

The emergence of the call centre industry in the Global South is emblematic of postmodern society in which services are fragmented and offshored through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The workers in these industries engage in affect labour to create a welcoming and familiar space while fielding their callers' inquiries and complaints. In contrast to their North American counterparts, workers in the Global South take on identities shaped by their clients' cultural values. In doing so, these workers can momentarily erase the racialized nature of their bodies, their voices, and their cultures. They are no longer 'the other,' working gruelling overnight shifts in a faraway country, but instead they live and work across an imaginary Middle America. By using affect theory and affective labour, we can investigate the lived experiences of call centre workers in the Global South, and how their labour is shaped by the need to culturally and affectively in the Global North. This will be done through investigating the development of the outsourced call centre industry as a form of transnational affective labour and the racialization of call centre workers through their interactions with foreign clients – which will be grounded on Hardt's conceptualization of affective labour and Lee's discussion of affective capitalism. This literature review will thus seek to understand how racialized bodies interact in transnational labour processes and affective capitalism through the call centre industry.

Affective Labour and Affective Capitalism

Several scholars have conceptualized the role affective labour both in society and within the capitalist mode of production. Hardt (1999) contextualizes his framework for affective labour within the development of capitalist production in the Global North and establishes three distinct periods – first, agriculture and raw resource extraction; second, manufacturing and heavy industry; and third, informatization and the service industry (p. 90). He argues that relationships formed in society are often within the context of society's relationship with labour, which is evident when analyzing shifts between production (Hardt, p. 91). The initial shift from agriculture to manufacturing (a period marked as modernization) saw the rise of assembly line factory work, and ways of thinking that embodied the machinery dominant in these factory settings (Hardt, p. 91). Hardt then posits that the shift from manufacturing towards the service industry (deemed as postmodernization) has also resulted in a similar shift, as ways of thinking became similar to the computers that were beginning to be integrated into the labour process (pp. 94-95). Now, workers are expected to instantly react to their surroundings, and correct their actions as necessary for the sake of efficiency (Hardt, p. 95). Most forms of work in this period area reconceptualized, from the mindlessness of production on factory floors to the mindfulness of service work – with workers now needing to skilfully attend to the whims of their clients while digital managing their company's services.

Hardt (1999) also describes the rise of immaterial labour, which he defines as labour that produces intangible commodities like services, data, or communication (p. 94). This immaterial labour is two-fold in that it consists of computational modes of thinking that require workers to react to external stimulus and affective labour – which Hardt defines as labour that produces or manipulates affect in the hopes of generating positive feelings of ease, satisfaction, and even a sense belonging or connectedness (p. 96). Similarly, Gupta (2023) also discusses the treatment of workers in the service industry as both the subjects and objects of experimentation, as they work in space with constant technological development to expedite work while engaging in affective labour (p. 79). Affective labour in other forms has always existed in society, especially when considering the prevalence of care work, reproductive work, or emotional labour. However, Hardt argues that forms of affective labour that focus on the management of affects have been subsumed under capital as an active and dominant value-generating force in the information economy (p. 97). Across all industries, immaterial and affective labour has been integrated within almost all labour process (Hardt, p. 97). These developments align with Ahmed's (2004) observation that emotions are often valued over thought as 'tools' to be managed and manipulated (p. 3). Thus, Hardt also laments that "human relations and culture have been instrumentalized, reified, and 'degraded' to the level of economic interactions" (p. 96). As a result, the emergence of these new forms of

labour – ones that appropriate one's emotional capacities in the service of their clients – amid the development of new communication technologies has significant implications for these workers.

The power of these developments has led scholars like Lee (2023) to argue that an entirely new form of capitalist production have emerged, which is predicated on valorizing affect as a dominant productive force. Affective capitalism seeks to locate and appropriate value from the affect that flows through societies in digital networks (Lee, p. 1). This conceptualization of affective capitalism focuses primarily the body and its response to affect, as Lee considers how Spinoza's conceptualization of affect as the ability of the body to affect or be affected by others related to the "intensity of relationships between bodies, the robustness of effects produced by bodily encounters and their persistence over time" (p. 3). Additionally, Lee defines affect as a relational force that occurs within encounters between bodies to establish the foundation of his framework (p. 14). Through the capitalist appropriation of affect, Lee posits that our social relationships and ability to affect and be affected are actively valorized and commodified for production – especially as technology develops and the economy becomes increasingly financialized (p. 12, 26). Padios' (2018) concept of productive intimacy is also generative when considering how affective capitalism works through subsumption, as workers often learn how to make these affective attachments and relationships productive for capital (p. 52). As a result, the commodification of affect and our affective capabilities as workers has become a dominant and driving force in a postmodern economy.

Ahmed's (2004) conceptualization of affective economies can be generative in understanding why affect is so lucrative. She describes how affects gain value through the circulation of signs, symbols, and values within society (Ahmed, p. 45). While affect does not inhabit these things directly, it is created through this very act of circulation as individuals interact within and form attachments to them within shared communities – with attachments being sustained through the management of positive and negative affects (Ahmed, p. 46). In contrast to capital circulation, affective economies are not driven to accumulate, but have already accumulated over time (Ahmed, p. 45). Yet, the accumulation of affective value is also predicated on the obfuscation of these histories of circulation, production, and labour (Ahmed, p. 11). Thus, this concept speaks to why affect is so powerful for capital, as affective economies are already established and people have strongly formed attachments to these economies. The emergence of affective labour and affective capitalism, and the advent of ICTs helped to establish the BPO and call centre work as significant industries in the Global South.

Transnational Affective Labour and the Call Centre Industry

The business process outsourcing (BPO) industry emerged amid the rise of flexible accumulation and the development of ICTs in the 1980s. The industry itself refers to various digital service work, including call centre work, content moderation, secretarial work, and human relations services, among other tasks. The dominance of offshoring service work was facilitated through the fragmentation of various aspects of service work across continents, as transnational corporations based in the Global North could take advantage of lower wages and relaxed labour legislations in the Global South (Mankekar & Gupta, 2016, p. 20). As a result, major corporations based in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom often offshore their telecommunications work to former colonies like the Philippines or India, where they can leverage existing colonial histories and relationships to establish these industries. When looking at the Philippine context in particular, Padios (2018) argues that the outsourcing of call center work embodies what she deems as 'Filipino/American relatability,' in which American corporations often appropriate affective cooperation from Filipino subjects to simultaneously solidify existing colonial structures while also fostering patronizing forms of cultural proximity to their former colony (p. 83). While the introduction of call center work to countries in the Global South offer new opportunities for workers in developing economies, this work continues to embody racial hierarchies of work predicated on racialized, 'low-skilled' office workers and white, 'high-skilled' researchers and developers.

The call centre industry is incredibly affect-laden, as workers are tasked with remotely managing the affects of their clients, while also solving their concerns in a timely manner. Mankekar and Gupta (2016) frame their analysis of the Indian call centre industry by noting that affect theory and affective labour foregrounds how affective and corporeal work in conjunction with technologies in the labour process of call centre work (p. 26). As much of the industry's primary metric for success is the intangible goal of 'customer satisfaction,' existing quotas and performance indicators are often inadequate in measuring the affective outcomes of a phone call. In trying to fulfill these quotas, call centre workers often need to assume "culturally appropriate affects in interactions with their clients" (Mankekar & Gupta, p. 26). The affective nature of call centre work has resulted in Mankekar and Gupta denoting it as a form of intimate labour, in which these workers produce labour that "exposes personal information that would leave one vulnerable if others had access to such knowledge" (p. 18). In their study, workers often described how certain callers divulged intimate aspects of their own daily lives as a form of venting, with some clients even repeatedly asking for certain workers to vent towards (Mankekar & Gupta, p. 34). Thus, these

calls can often be emotionally burdensome and tolling, with some lasting for hours – often offsetting the expectation of having shorter and shorter call times (Padios, 2018, p. 35). The difficult and tolling nature of affective call centre work is exacerbated by growing tensions that arise from the outsourcing of labour – as aural characteristics of identity and nationality mark workers in the Global South as 'the other,' actively 'stealing jobs' from those in the Global North.

Affective Labour and Racialized Bodies

The outsourcing of call centres is one of the most tangible ways in which consumers in the Global North directly interact with the transnational nature of production. While commodities are often produced overseas, most people will never directly encounter or witness the factory worker manufacturing their goods on the assembly line or figure out which cargo ship transported their electronics. However, more and more people are calling customer support lines and speaking to these racialized bodies in the Global South. Ahmed's (2004) framework for how hate works through bodies is generative in understanding why workers often experience xenophobic remarks during these calls. For one, these encounters bring to light the notion that work can be, and is already being easily offshored – and these workers embody the threat of jobs being taken away from white, middle-class workers. While call centre work is relatively 'low-skilled' on the service industry hierarchy, Mankekar and Gupta (2016) note that these workers mark the threat of higher-paying jobs being "stolen" by workers in the Global South, willing to work for 'lower wages (p. 22). While most forms of identity management and accent neutralization work to foster the illusion of national labour homogeneity, slips in accents or cultural knowledge can mark the call centre worker as 'the other.' Thus, these phone calls symbolize the racialized call centre worker, "who may stand for or stand by other others, press[ing] against [the caller] threatening [their existence]" (Ahmed, p. 51). In doing so, the caller projects the undesirability of offshoring and the threat of 'stolen jobs' onto the worker. The caller becomes dismissive, immediately rejecting any form of authority or knowledge that the worker possesses and asking to speak to someone in America, or Canada, or somewhere where the workers sound white – placing blame on someone caught between two worlds instead of the corporations actively outsourcing the work themselves.

As a result, call centres integrate accent neutralization and identity management to try and ameliorate the possibility of xenophobic encounters. While they could be understood as coping techniques to avoid the chance of racist backlash,

the use of these techniques also separates the worker from their geographic location and their lived experiences. In this respect, call centre workers are expected to be malleable subjects – to alter their personalities and identities to alleviate the threat their callers could feel. Fabros (2009) takes on Goffman's presentation of the self to consider how workers are 'performing' for their companies and clients through the manufacturing of meanings and signs that exemplify a variety of values, including corporate branding, affective care, and identity management (p. 356). Gupta (2023) also argues that identity management acts as a form of technology that "consider[s] human workers as a kind of technology needing to be updated [and] marks the 'blurring of boundaries between discourses of technological and human development'" (p. 83). These techniques help to disguise and obfuscate "the material fact of outsourcing," in that those calling in would simply assume that these workers happen to live and work in the same locales as they do (Muthyala, 2012, p. 181).

When considering accent neutralization, Padios (2018) describes how this process acts as a way to remove the body from particular spaces and colonial histories, as accented English has become a marker for the racialized and colonized body (p. 112-113). Padios even notes that many corporations tend to favour Filipino call centres, as workers often speak English with a lighter and more neutral accent (p. 2). As a result, call centres tend to push for further accent neutralization to create what she deems as 'placeless accents' – ensuring that clients are unable to discern where their calls are being routed to, or where these workers are from (p. 113). Even without call centre work in mind, the idealization of the 'placeless accent' continues to be important for racialized bodies in the Global South.

In call centre training, Muthyala (2012) describes how workers engage in two forms of identity management – creating and managing national and personal identities. He takes on Appadurai's concept of globally variable synaesthesia, which describes "[how] identities are manipulated and effects are dislocated" (Muthyala, p. 172). Within national identity management, workers are expected to take on identities embodied within their callers through cultural learning – often taking on Western names or researching characteristics of where their clients are calling from to sound like locals. Through national identity management in Indian call centres, Muthyala laments that call centre training creates environments where workers are disincentivized to think critically about their work. He describes how prospective workers are often screened for negative views of America to ensure that only those with positive perceptions can get the job (Muthyala, p. 178). Padios (2018) also denotes how call centre workers leverage Philippine-American relatability when speaking to callers, as the cultural proximity between these two nations has resulted

in a closer understanding of American values (p. 83). As a result, the nature of call centre work tends to elevate Western cultural values when speaking with callers to ensure customer satisfaction, and to portray themselves as being familiar instead of foreign. However, these spaces can also create "a condition of sociality that leads to a new society itself" (Muthyala, p. 178) – one that ultimately supports existing structures of power.

Padios' (2018) analysis of identity management is noteworthy in that while American values are often considered when talking to callers, workers also leverage Philippine cultural values to establish themselves as 'the ideal worker' for engaging in these types of work. She argues that the affective nature of call centre work embodies cultural norms that emphasize the relationship-oriented nature of Filipino workers, and that focus on "relatability, emotion, and mutuality" (p. 62) as core concepts for work. In contrast to Muthyala's findings, there is an evident belief that American values are not idealized – with workers often claiming that Americans are too individualistic and forgetful in nature (Padios, p. 89). As a result, she argues that using Filipino values to relate to their American clients is "proof of their modern subjectivity and their readiness to lead the global economy with both technical skill and affective acumen" (p. 90).

In contrast, workers often engage in forms of personal identity management as a way of separating themselves from their callers. Muthyala (2012) notes that this separation allows workers to cope with the demands of their work, while also cementing the idea that their work persona is predicated on professionalism, rather than as a replacement of their identity entirely (p. 188). Fabros (2009) furthers this argument by noting that forms of identity creation and management allow workers to situate themselves in a constantly shifting social environment (p. 351). In the Philippine context, Padios (2018) describes how forms of coping often focus on workers retaking aspects of their national and cultural identities as points of pride. Workers often take on nationalist discourse when coming to terms with their position on the global labour hierarchy. During training sessions, instructors would often loudly proclaim that "[they] are not Americans – [they] are Filipinos" (Padios, pp. 110-111). Additionally, workers often default to representing angry American clients as stereotypically unintelligent and ignorant (Padios, p. 123). These mechanisms signal a clear demarcation between the caring national identities formed at the call centre and the personal and cultural identities that workers personally embody. They also signify ways for workers to 'construct powerful selves,' in which they can individually elevate themselves above the angry caller, and the social and racial hierarchies that position them in this manner without going against the caller, or actively changing

these hierarchies (Sherman, 2007, as cited in Padios, p. 123). The separation of these two identities can act as a form of inscrutability. Workers can continue to uphold the idealization of Asian workers as being low-waged, apolitical, and eager to contribute, while still withholding and retaining aspects of themselves (Huang, 2022, p. 12).

While these forms of identity creation and management can be used to prevent or ameliorate xenophobic encounters with foreign clients, these techniques – and the call centre industry as a whole – continue to create and facilitate conditions that leave workers in limbo between two different versions of themselves, and existing in two places at once. These techniques serve the interests of transnational corporations that are actively outsourcing these jobs. Accent neutralization and identity management serve to obscure this outsourcing process, and conceal the working conditions these workers endure. Who are we to know that Sarah from Milwaukee is actually working at one in the morning to better support her three children living in Manila? If these techniques fail and these workers are 'exposed' as the recipients of outsourced work, any anger expressed by the clients is often directed towards 'the other' for 'stealing their jobs' and being 'uneducated and inadequate'. This perpetuates a sense of 'otherness' among the workers, making global labour solidarity that much harder to achieve. The conditions within the industry work to exacerbate this issue, as these workers are often separated from traditional support systems that help sustain their emotional and mental health needs, as they often have to work overnight and thus spend little to no time with their friends and families. In this regard, the affective labour that Hardt (1999) deems as having the most potential for resistance – the caring work needed to produce life through affect – is hindered.

Conclusion – and Hopes for the Future

The circulation of signs and values in society has been an incredibly lucrative endeavour for new modes of production, as corporations actively appropriate the affects generated within these economies to create profit. Amid the rise of informationalization and the service industry, affective labour has become a dominant form of value-generation across several industries. Through the offshoring of the BPO industry to countries in the Global South, racialized call centre workers are offered new opportunities to engage in the information economy as a new labour force, hoping they can move forward in the industry. However, as these bodies enter global labour markets, they are met with dissent by callers who blame them for 'stealing North American jobs.' This 'othering' forces these workers to take on forms of affective and intimate labour that predicate the momentary erasure of their

racialization to foster environments of familiarity to promote customer satisfaction. Forms of coping allow workers to build inscrutable personalities that alleviate how they perceive themselves within these hierarchies, but they must still grapple with the conditions of their work. Thus, these workers often live and work between two worlds. Not only do these conditions drain them of the positive affects and capacities needed to sustain them throughout the workday, but they are also separated from their families and loved ones who can provide additional support. Amid these discomforts, there are still some affective capacities available to workers that foster community-building and care, and that can facilitate forms of biopower from below. While working in a competitive industry and being away from friends and family, workers often form close bonds with one another through a mutual understanding of these types of work. Although forms of resistance can be difficult to locate within such a precarious industry, they do exist within the affective solidarity shared among workers across continents.

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Curating a feeling: Museums and affect

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Abstract

Emotions play a vital role in forming meaning within a museum setting. They shape the narrative that binds the artifacts and exhibits together in a cohesive history for visitors to experience. As a means for educating the public on histories, museums have harnessed emotions in a variety of manners, each with their own functions and implications. This paper examines three texts from three different authors writing on this topic. Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas' analysis of the 9/11 Memorial Museum will be used to discuss how the museum fashions emotion to immerse visitors in the day's events and then turns this emotion toward a visualized perpetrator. Research on the Tenement Museum in New York provided by Davina M. Desroches will then be discussed, particularly how the organization's practices contradict the affective experience within the museum. I will then conclude with a discussion of Amy K. Levin's concept of precarious knowledge, which describes the risk of adverse reactions to learning about painful and traumatic events in a museum setting. Writings from scholars working more directly with affect theory are also pulled into the discussion, including Sara Ahmed, and Natalie Kouri-Towe. This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of affect in museums. By providing three succinct examples of how affect operates within museums, this paper serves as a theoretical starting point for future research for those working within the field of affect as well as individuals working within museum curation.

Keywords: Museums; affect; trauma

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In the following paper, I will discuss how affect operates within a museum setting, particularly how emotional responses from visitors are mediated to form meaning. I will also discuss the implications of this mediation and how it connects to broader political issues. This analysis will rely heavily on three texts that discuss the role that affect has played in specific museums. I begin with a text from Micieli-Voutsinas (2021) on the 9/11 Memorial Museum and how it forms a historical narrative through an emotionally immersive experience. I then move onto an article on the Tenement Museum from DesRoches (2021) which argues the museum's celebration of working-class immigrant experiences is undermined by the politics behind the museum's organizational structure. Through an analysis using affect theory, I will demonstrate how these experiences perpetuate fear of certain bodies and obscure political realities. The third text is from Levin (2021) and is primarily utilized to discuss the concept of *precarious knowledge*, a term used to describe the risk of adverse reactions to learning about certain concepts in a museum setting. I use precarious knowledge to form an analysis of how museums recirculating trauma can lead to an affective response of turning away from knowledge and offer a possible avenue through which this analysis may serve as a useful tool for future discussions of museum curation.

The 9/11 Memorial Museum

The 9/11 Memorial Museum exists as an example of what is called affective heritage, a form of museology where "visitors learn the cultural significance of places of memory through the generation of visceral sensations and embodied feelings that (...) communicate the resonance of the past." (2021, p. 3) To this point, the design and layout of the museum's main galleries situate visitors in various perspectives concerning the attacks - witness, survivor, and victim (2021, p.67-79). These perspectives are achieved through a plethora of sonic and visual examples: hearing phone calls from victims to loved ones, gazing upon photos of individuals looking in shock at the sight of the Towers burning, and being guided past the jagged recovered remains of the World Trade Centre. One of these is the Survivors' Stairs, a flight of stairs that survivors walked through to escape the collapse of the Towers; the flight of stairs was excavated from the rubble and now exists within the museum, placed in a manner where visitors must walk by the flight as they travel down into a lower level of the museum (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p.72-73). Visitors encounter the Stairs after having already gone through a portion of the museum and becoming immersed in the events of the 9/11 attacks through intimate and visceral content. This specific layout "[makes] visitors retrace the survivors' path [and] effectively places visitor experiences in dialogue with those of survivors." (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p.73) The intensity of this movement and content at times

manifests in physical discomfort. Visitors have been known to experience feelings of claustrophobia or being choked and panic attacks (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p.74). Relatedly, the museum has also developed "emotional exits" (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p.64) for visitors who find the experience too overwhelming and wish to leave the galleries immediately. The profoundness and emotional impact of museum content such as the Survivors' Stairs relies on the circulation of affect associated with the traumatic events experienced on 9/11. Ahmed's theory of affective economies surmises that "signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become." (2014, p.45) In the example of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, we see this circulation of affect articulating history. Affect is an educational component that informs individuals of history by having them *feel it* (Michieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p.50). This occurs in due part to the vivid elements of trauma on display- this was a tragic event because you feel it as such. At the core of this are museum artifacts operating as objects through which these feelings circulate. In this instance, the circulation is predicated on a physical movement through the museum's space.

But beyond operating in an informative character, affect also shapes perceptions of bodies. After the emotionally draining experience of going through the main galleries, visitors enter an area that focuses on the attacks' perpetrators. Included in this section are photographs of the hijackers and an informational film on the origins of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and "the greater Middle-Eastern threat." (quoted in Michieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p.77) The progression of the narrative from the specific day-of events into the deeper context of the attacks can be described as "Having just endured the emotional trauma of the first gallery, museum attendees are entirely unprepared to process this subsequent gallery space (...) the inclusion of the perpetrators' images and information pertinent to the terror plots only confirms what we, the visitors, already know about *them*." (Michieli-Voutsinas, 2021, p. 76, emphasis in original) The negative emotions endured from the previous galleries then become entangled with a perception of the Middle East as the direct culprit of this tragedy and its emotions. The Middle-East becomes a visualized target of where to direct these feelings toward. The narrative evoked by the museum's progression of content (placing the background and planning of the attacks after the day-of galleries) situates the Al-Qaeda threat as a possible future, a looming entity waiting in the wings following an attack. Ahmed describes anxiety and fear as operating in two separate yet relatable manners (2014, p.65-66). Ahmed explains, "Anxiety becomes attached to particular objects (...) as an effect of its travels [between objects]. The detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world." (2014, p.66) Fear is defined as being predicated on

potential future harm, an "anticipation of hurt or injury" (Ahmed, 2014, p.65) though felt in the present. This taxonomy is exemplified within the museum. We can think back to descriptions of visitors experiencing panic attacks while going through galleries, their anxiety building upon each curated display of artifacts meant to immerse individuals in the emotions of 9/11. This overwhelming array of feelings is then projected onto bodies, represented by the inclusion of the hijackers. Their inclusion after the presentation of the 9/11 events places terrorism from the Middle East as an ominous future danger. This also exemplifies another of Ahmed's concepts on the "global politics of fear" which she uses to describe the rise of Islamophobia following the 9/11 attacks and "[the use of fear in] creating a distinction between those who are 'under threat' and those who threaten." (2014, p. 72)

The 9/11 Memorial Museum is an example of an emotionally driven immersive experience that relies on affect to shape a historical narrative of grief and trauma. This narrative informs history by having visitors feel, in certain ways, as mediated by the content, history is told based on how it makes you feel. The intense circulation of emotion within the museum works further to define whom we should direct such abject feelings toward by weaving fear and anxiety into its narrative of the attacks.

The Tenement Museum

The Tenement Museum was founded in 1988 in Manhattan's Lower East Side (LES) as a museum on the experiences of the immigrant working class who lived in the neighbourhood in the late 19th/early 20th century. The museum is housed in an original tenement building and "practically since its inception has been lauded as exemplary both in terms of its captivating exhibitions as well as in its commitment to historic preservation." (DesRoches, 2021, p. 1054) It features guided tours through apartments recreated to appear as still lived-in by previous tenants of the time and outdoor tours that focus more broadly on the surrounding neighbourhood (DesRoches, 2021, p.1052). As DesRoches recounts from their experience visiting the museum, "The apartments are meant to give the impression of a moment frozen in time. The front room of the Gumpertz apartment, for example, looks as though a seamstress has just stepped out for a break. Clothes are draped over a dressing room screen, and fabric swatches cover a Singer sewing machine, just as they may have been in 1878." (2021, p.1055) Described here is one recreated apartment meant to tell a specific family's experience. These experiences are collected from records and personal interviews and are meant to humanize the museum's content, to "[elevate] everyday real-life people who never dreamed their stories would become the subject

matter of museums".(Tenement Museum, n.d.) Information is derived from the everyday experiences of immigrant families, and similarly to the 9/11 Memorial Museum, immersion becomes a key element of creating a narrative - to learn of this history is to experience it as it happened, in the location it happened. Affect's role in forming a narrative is also observable. DesRoches notes (2021, p.1055) that the guided tour moves groups through the building's narrow passages while advising them to refrain from touching the walls, a rule which helps to recreate the building's past over crowdedness. Here, visitors are made to *feel* similar to the families mentioned on the tour. In contrast with the examples of immersive experiences discussed in the previous section, the Tenement certainly offers a much more tame experience. It also constitutes much of the museum's main goal - to make you feel like you're in the everyday life of one of these families. This is further exemplified by moments on the tour where visitors are instructed to interact with specific items. In one instance, guests are invited to hold an "extremely heavy antique iron to get a sense of the physicality of [the tenant's] labour." (DesRoches, 2021, p. 1055) The usefulness of affect in the everyday to tell a history has been discussed by Gopinath (2018) and Stewart (2007). For Gopinath, it is an element of an "alternative archive [which] produce forms of queer desire and identification across multiple temporalities, and narrate the construction of queer selfhood and queer genealogies in non-teleological terms." (2018, p.11) Stewart utilizes everyday (or ordinary) affect as a mapping tool in journal-style writing, with the aim of "[fashioning] some form of address that is adequate to their form; to find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate." (2007, p.4) For both writers, engaging with the features of everyday life is a valid starting point for an intimate analysis of the contours of life for individuals living in specific geographic and social contexts.

On the surface, the Tenement Museum is grasping at this same thread, piecing together a narrative of the immigrant experience by placing visitors within the intimate spaces of the families that once lived there. This relies on a sense of feeling, be it claustrophobic due to the cramped spaces or a sense of exhaustion upon holding a heavy item (I use *sense* as I don't mean to suggest one would be physically exhausted after holding the item for a brief moment but rather that one is expected to conjure a perception of what it means to feel exhausted to engage with the object as an educational feature of the tour). However, the affective experience within the museum obscures the context in which this experience takes place. While the museum works to preserve the materiality of history, the LES continues to face rapid gentrification. An element which has "presented a challenge for the museum, which looks to create an immersive experience heavily reliant upon its surrounding environment." (DesRoches, 2021, p.1059) The museum has also faced criticism for its

organizational practices, which are contrary to its ethos of celebrating immigrant working-class history. In 2007, museum employees fought to unionize due to "poor working conditions and precarious employment." (DesRoches, 2021, p.1060) Tenement leadership refused to acknowledge the union, leading to a workers' protest outside a 20th-anniversary dinner in March 2008 (DesRoches, 2021, p.1060). Concerning the members of the Tenement's board- "It is notable the board includes no representation from organized labor, community activists, or members of anti-poverty groups. Cultural diversity and community connectedness are downplayed in favour of business experience and perceived influence in fundraising (…) [the museum] mute[s] the more fractious elements of working-class history in favour of a sentimentalized past." (DesRoches, 2021, p.1050) The world imagined within the Tenement's "everyday" suddenly takes a more cynical turn as it seems less like a celebration than a memorial for days gone by. In their analysis of the American Museum of Natural History, Bal (1992) describes an individual's experience visiting a museum as dependent on "the willing suspension of disbelief that rules the power of fiction (...) setting the terms of the contract between viewer and museum." (p.563-564) Bal describes how a museum visit entails a certain level of obfuscation on the visitor's part of logic, a mental slate that acknowledges what is being put on display is a *display* or representation of an event or moment in time. By entering the sentimental everyday world that Tenement Museum portrays, visitors are asked to suppress feelings of their current realities, to ignore the gentrification of the surrounding neighbourhood or the workers' protest down the block. One plays a part in an affective narrative of history that romanticizes a past hurled further away by the museum's organizational structure.

The Tenement Museum strives to preserve the experiences of working-class immigrants by asking guests to empathize with their feelings. However, this preservation is undermined by the museum's organizational practices, which uphold an anti-union and capitalist structure. In this example, affect obscures modern-day realities and glorifies a past that one needs to opt in to so as to engage with it emotionally.

Precarious knowledge

Levin (2021) offers a helpful starting point for analyzing how museums circulate trauma in their exhibitions. The author provides the concept of *precarious knowledge* to describe the always-present risk of adverse emotional reactions to the dissemination of knowledge. Levin specifically notes the example of an exhibition titled *The Aleppo* that took place in 2017 at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (2021, p.32). The exhibition featured photographs of life and destruction in the Syrian city,

one of which was a "life-size photograph of a female fighter holding a machine gun in one arm and an infant in the other." (Levin, 2021. p.32) Levin notes an observation of one of their students on a school visit to the exhibition: "Deeply disturbed, my student repeated how this image, which engaged uncompromisingly with her gaze, clashed with her perceptions of motherhood (...) the viewer is so upset that she resists the opportunity to open her mind, and with it, the ability to act upon any transformed beliefs." (2021, p.32) Precarious knowledge becomes exemplified, as Levin suggests, that such challenges to worldviews and their negative feelings hinder opportunities for meaningful action or change. Levin also describes an experience encountered at a body art exhibition in the same museum "a rail-thin young woman gazes at images and objects relating to body modifications such as tattoos and scarring. She pulls into a balcony flanking the atrium and sobs heavily. Her face reddens as she tells her companions she is embarrassed by scars from cutting her wrists, arms, and legs. She is led out of the exhibition, and the group leaves the museum." (2021, p. 30) While offering up this knowledge in the form of exhibitions that vividly demonstrate trauma or violence may seem beneficial, the emotions derived from it may actually impede motivation in some individuals to further engage with the topic. To return to Ahmed (2014, p.54), experiences such as these harken to their concept of affect moving bodies in a certain way. In this case, affect moves bodies to turn away from a source of knowledge.

While the example of Levin's student viewing *The Aleppo* covers an individual's feelings detached from the content, precarious knowledge is also involved with retraumatizing individuals who have lived through the events portrayed in a museum. The Eldheimar Museum in Vestmannaeyjabær, Iceland, was built to commemorate a 1973 volcanic eruption that destroyed the homes of much of the tiny island's inhabitants, forcing families to evacuate, with many eventually deciding not to return (Árnason & Baldur Hafsteinsson, 2023). For those that did return, "[they]were confronted with a significantly changed landscape, a home wrought unfamiliar, uncanny even (...) and thus threatening." (Árnason & Baldur Hafsteinsson, 2023, p.153) The Eldheimar utilizes the remnants of one of the remaining original houses and relies on an emotionally immersive experience to educate visitors on the eruption. The specific placement of the museum in the original site of tragedy forced victims who had gone through the eruption to confront their trauma. As Árnason & Baldur Hafsteinsson (2023) note, "with chances to talk about their experience not having been available to them at the time of the eruption itself, some of the evacuees now speak of their experience in the language of trauma and suggest that the establishment of the museum enforces a troubling visit to a site of trauma." (p.153) In this example, the museum's attempt at spreading knowledge of an event perpetuates negative emotions among those who experienced the event. As

this paper has so far demonstrated, affect within a museum space can be harnessed towards othered bodies (as in the case of the 9/11 Memorial Museum), it can obscure the problematic politics of an organization (as in the case of the Tenement Museum), and as demonstrated by Levin's *precarious knowledge*, it can cause further negative emotions that retraumatize individuals or temper desires to further engage with topics and themes. When it comes to affective experiences in museums, are the harms worth the benefits? Are museums as we know them an apt locale for retelling history in this fashion?

Rather than suggest a complete tear-down, I bring in Kouri-Towe's (2017) discussion on risk and attachment. Kouri-Towe argues that an overtly emotional attachment to social activist groups can turn into a detriment, as the desire to see the longevity of a movement can instead see it morph into a contradictory manner, which subverts the work it attempts to do. This poses a risk for groups, as this desire to keep going may do more harm than good. This risk manifests as the fear of failure (Kouri-Towe, 2017, p. 198). Still, this fear shouldn't necessarily be seen as a sign not to move forward but rather a starting point for creating meaningful societal transformation, "when we recognize when our attachments fail our intentions (...) this opens us to both an examination of risk in the shaping of our attachments and desires by neoliberalism and a consideration over the risk of becoming stubborn in our attachments to groups." (Kouri-Towe, 2017, p.198) Kouri-Towe's concept of attachment and risk bears similarities to the current conditions of museums. One could argue we are attached to them as apt sites of public good and historical memory. Our emotional reactions while immersed in their pedagogical experiences even appear to confirm this. The risk of continuing with this sentiment presents itself in the previously discussed examples and harkens to precarious knowledge. Precarity is used to insinuate a *delicacy* when presenting history - The risk of bad feelings may emerge, and it can cause harm. However, these risks offer ways to engage with museums critically and imagine better possibilities that arise when we look back on pitfalls. It bears to mind the old adage - how will you know to fix a mistake if you've never made one? This is not to suggest that curators should recklessly curate, or that trauma induced is justified so long as it produces an end. Rather that with such delicate histories our strategies for handling them require thoughtfulness that continually yearns to self-correct by developing new methods for sharing knowledge.

Implementing affect within museums that deal with precarious knowledge pose a risk for recirculating negative feelings. However, through critical analysis of examples of this occurring, we challenge our attachment to the idea of museums as inherently beneficial. When we question this notion we expand the possibilities of how museums may operate.

Conclusion

This paper utilized theories of affect to discuss the implications of museum exhibitions, which rely on emotional responses from visitors. Discussions revolved around what affect does in specific museum settings and how curatorial techniques and broader social politics mediate it. The 9/11 Museum was explored as a site which stokes intense emotional reactions by immersing visitors in traumatic events and constructing a narrative through emotions. Affect is used to explain a history but also constructs responsible parties for trauma, an aspect resembling wider Islamophobia in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Affect is similarly present in the example of the Tenement Museum which immerses individuals in the everyday experiences of immigrant working-class families. This is done by inviting guests to *feel* as if they were back in the era these experiences took place. The museum's organizational structure, which reaffirms a capitalist and anti-union ideology, turns engagement with the museum into emotional labour as visitors must quell political realities to step back in time. This paper concluded by exploring Levin's precarious knowledge and the risk of recirculating trauma through museum exhibitions. Affect in this example turns people away from engaging with the knowledge shared by the museum. By connecting with Kouri-Towe's argument on risk/attachment, I posited that such possible negatives could be seen as starting points to improve curatorial practices and push for further critical engagement with how we choose to remember and feel history.

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"The reparative process is care": Affective care-relational ethics as the reparative methodology in engagement work with Ethnic Minority communities in Vietnam

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Abstract

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 ethnic groups recognized by the Vietnamese government, with the Kinh or Viet being the majority. From the past to the present day, Ethnic Minority people have been marginalized in social and political participation, culturally appropriated, had ancestral lands taken away for national infrastructure projects, and stigmatized for their cultural practices and unique ways of living. Despite the absence of a formal reconciliation process, many efforts have been made to celebrate "diversity in unity" or "multiculturalism," such as national dialogues, multi-ethnic schooling and the inclusion of Ethnic Minority features in the media. Setting aside the adverse effects resulting from good intentions but wrong implementation, it is evident that most interventions established by the ethnic majority align with their convenience, their set of principles, and their ways of interpretation. That said, it is just as important to imagine the "otherwise" as it is to critique what has been happening. This paper examines affective care-relational ethics as such an "otherwise" counterbalancing the Vietnamese dominant morality shaped by Confucianism and Socialist ideologies. The paper synthesizes the feminist approach in ethics of care and affect theories to furnish an ample space to develop care ethics to work with Ethnic Minority people in Vietnam.

Key words: multiculturalism; ethnic Minority; morality; care; affect

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Ethnic Minority refers to a totality of ethnic groups in Vietnam, including 53 recognized groups by the Vietnamese government and the other underrecognized groups, and in counterbalance to the Ethnic Majority, known as Kinh or Viet people. Vietnam supported UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), yet the government refrains from acknowledging Ethnic Minorities as Indigenous Peoples. Instead, they categorize these groups under the term Ethnic Minority, excluding only the Kinh Majority. The Vietnamese government emphasizes the principle of "unity in diversity" (Ethnic Minorities and Indigenous People - Open Development Vietnam, 2019)

Throughout the formation of Vietnam as a nation and its long journey to gain independence, ethnic conflicts have been significantly interwoven with all historical events. These include the erasure of ancient regimes (e.g., the Champa kingdom), the establishment of the official Vietnamese script (Chữ quốc ngữ) alongside the suppression of Ethnic Minorities' indigenous languages (e.g., the imposition of Vietnamese Hmong script invented by Kinh people), the uprisings of Ethnic Minority groups seeking autonomy (e.g., the Montagnard uprisings), and many others. Such historical conflicts have made it challenging for the descendants of both sides to meaningfully engage in the process of reconciliation.

Under the modernization and industrialization process, the Vietnamese government systematically and intensively promoted the concept of "mountainous zones" as a significant obstacle to "national development" after introducing Program 135 in 1997. This program specifically targeted poverty reduction in Ethnic Minority areas. In contemporary Vietnam, major energy infrastructure plants are frequently erected on the ancestral lands of Ethnic Minority communities, often without their participation in decision-making processes. Their valuable skills in textiles, pottery, agriculture, and religion are frequently appropriated by the Kinh people without due credit. These contributions, hidden from the dominant gaze and silenced in public discourse, persist as subtle traces in literature, memories, songs, and most chronically, in the enduring 'underdeveloped' conditions experienced by Ethnic Minorities. The prevailing perception of development, primarily tied to material benefits, reinforces the prioritization of rationality and political correctness, consequently leading to the exclusion of symbolic values expressed in more nuanced ways (Giang Nguyen-Thu, 2021, pp. 27-28).

The recognition of diverse ethnic groups coexisting in Vietnam implicitly draws a connection to multiculturalism—a concept most often used in reference to Western nation-states and has been the official policy in several of them since the 1970s. Many nation-states in Africa and Asia are "multicultural" in a descriptive

sense, although the historical backgrounds are different (Reddy, 2019, p. 151). This paper examines the approach of the Vietnamese government in building a "unity in diversity" nation, framing it as a policy that has parallels with "multiculturalist" policies in the Western world. This deliberate choice aims to make sense of critiques on multiculturalism within the context of Vietnam.

Multiculturalism functions in Vietnamese society through the lens of its unique moral standards heavily influenced by Confucianism and Socialist ideologies (Doan, 2005). Built upon hierarchy and male supremacy, Confucian principles enforce absolute respect and obedience from children to parents, wives to husbands, subordinates to superiors, subjects to masters, and students to teachers (Doan, 2005, p. 459). Confucian values not only entail familial love but also extend to communal benevolence among people living in the same community or country. Inspired by Confucian ideology, Ho Chi Minh, often referred to as the "Vietnamese godfather" for his role in paving the way for Vietnam's independence and reunification, advocated for social harmony and the elimination of hatred between Ethnic Minorities and the Ethnic Majority. He also urged Ethnic Minority groups to support the interim government against foreign invasion and expressed the North government's desire to assist in their economic development and improvement of the education system (Jingqing, 2019, p. 8). In addition to traditional values, socialist morality underscores the individual's responsibility to the nation as part of a socialist society, emphasizing respect for labor and adherence to socialist principles that demand individuals' full commitment to collective success or the success of socialism. However, this notion of success has been challenged in the market economy, where personal achievements in terms of career and wealth are often prioritized as life goals and primary social recognitions (Doan, 2005, p. 461).

Differing from the legal system, moral values are not fixed; they evolve and adapt over time through constant interaction with both internal and external factors. However, in general, Vietnamese moral values are deeply rooted in the promotion of collectivism and loyalty to the nation-state. Similar to other institutionalized moral systems, Vietnamese morality presents several problems: (1) Morality often transcends the realm of emotions and feelings, becoming solely a matter of reason; (2) Morality tends to be perceived as universal, sometimes overlooking local customs or traditions; (3) If there are local variations, they can be explained as less developed forms of moral thought. The highest level of moral reasoning is often viewed as objective and rational, transcending individual or cultural differences (Tronto, 2020, p. 9). Within this moral framework, the multicultural approach in Vietnam acknowledges the perspectives of Ethnic Minorities regarding their contributions to the common good of the nation and society. This recognition serves to justify past and

ongoing processes of violent developmental interventions, cultural exploitation, and the suppression of minority voices. In this regard, it shares similarities with the problematic implementation of multiculturalism in Canada, as criticized by Robinson (2017, p. 220) "Such (multicultural) initiatives raise the profile of First Peoples' cultural contributions to the state only to undercut their sovereign status first and foremost as the sui generis expressions of First Peoples." While Indigenous people in Canada are often perceived as "angry Indians" (Robinson, 2021, p. 221), Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam are seen as "too politically sensitive" (Giang Nguyen-Thu, 2021, p. 56) in the public eye due to their "unwillingness to let go of less-than-palatable cultural differences in order to participate as proper subjects of both the nation state and academic systems" (Robinson, 2021, p. 224). In response, I agree with Robinson that "beyond mere critiques" it is equally crucial to propose "reparative methodologies" (2017, p. 221). These methodologies not only resonate with the lived experiences of Ethnic Minority people but also provide ample opportunities for engagement with them in Vietnam.

In the following sections, this paper synthesizes the feminist approach in ethics of care and affect theories/studies to envision a reparative process or alternative forms of solidarity and reconciliation that do not require the "letting-go" of anger or the neutralization of differences.

Care with is the affective form of "reorientation" towards others

While care signifies an ethical orientation and action demonstrating concern for others, it is often associated with numerous violations, such as the selective care frame leading to the exclusion of certain individuals or stigmatization that renders those dependent on care powerless and indebted (Crean, 2020, p. 57).

A feminist ethics of care, known as care with (Tronto, 2020) or nurturing-led affective care (Crean, 2020), is the moral philosophy that recognizes "dynamic process full of ambivalences" (Wray, 2021, p. 131), lies in the "relationality and interdependence" (Scuzzarello, 2009, p. 65) and has capacity to "generate solidarity between those in caring relationships and others who recognise the importance of care to collective wellbeing" (bluinc, 2020). This ethics of care is different to other systems of social relations in a way that they operate under an ethic of other-centeredness, even when they fail in the purpose of nurturing such relations (Crean, 2020, p. 58).

The affective relationality between the subject (the carer) and the object (the cared), as conceptualized in Ahmed's approach to affect theory, involves (re)actions

or relations of "towardness" or "awayness" (2004, p. 8). Such orientations are influenced by impressions, memories (past impressions), and evaluations. The concept of "impression" allows us to avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts, and instead view human experience holistically and relationally, where emotions are the affect of one surface upon another, leaving a mark or trace (2004, p. 6). Ahmed approaches affective relationality or sociality of emotion not in the way that impressions embodied and circulated within and through the inside and outside or the *I* and the *We* boundaries or surfaces, rather, such surfaces or boundaries are made in contact with others (2004, p. 10).

Nurturing relations through feminist care ethics involves a (re)orientation towards others and, to a certain extent, the deconstruction of boundaries or surfaces formed in past encounters. This reparative process requires a certain level of engagement. However, instead of seeking "moral motivation" for engagement, we should maintain sufficient detachment to recognize the moral difficulties inherent in caring situations. In other words, while individuals may be deeply engaged in caring activities, they also need to maintain a degree of objectivity to effectively address moral complexities. For instance, in the case of development workers based in Ethnic Minority's residences, a sense of belonging develops over years through everyday experiences within the community. As the boundaries between the *I* and the *We* are constantly (re)constructed through engagement with care, development workers may sometimes find the line dividing themselves from the community too blurry or even non-existent. Such deep engagement may make the changes in the community, as a side effect of non-profit organization's intervention, less evident to the development workers, leading to the neglect of moral considerations. Therefore, a certain degree of detachment is necessary to maintain the critical reflexivity of participants in such engagements.

"The reparative process is care"

In the context of interactions between Indigenous protesters and non-Indigenous customers at Idle No More gatherings in Victoria and North Vancouver's malls, Robinson identifies "enchantment" as a form of momentary impression (Bennett, 2001, as cited in Robinson, 2017, p. 230) enacting the (re)orientation of both *turning into* (connection) and *turning away* (disruption) tendency to the object (2017, p. 231). Such gatherings "refused settler ontologies of protest in favour or Indigenous forms of song and dance as enchanted structures encourages us to give away some of our own time and effort on behalf of other creatures" (Bennett, 2001, as cited in Robinson, 2017, p. 230), at the same time, asks them to "reconsider the

issue tied to enchantment's force [...] through the push and pull of alienation and wonder" (2017, p. 231). The enchantment is similarly evident in the "Harmony of Diversity" performance in Vietnam. Organized annually by Tien Phong, a pioneering network advocating for the voices of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, this event takes place in both the capital city and local areas. According to Giang Nguyen-Thu (2021), these cultural performances are enacting an understanding that Ethnic Minorities "have" a lot to share. Such understanding is transformative for the Ethnic Minority participants, enabling them to start shaking off internalized discrimination after decades of being told that they have "nothing" to offer the world but backwardness, passivity, and vanishing heritage. For their audiences, watching the performances provide an (un)learning experience to come to terms with a simple truth: there are vivid worlds out there, beyond the world of the majority (p. 44). Within these cultural spaces, seamless performances are less important than a collective endeavour to slowly undo decades of cultural voicelessness (p.49). In his essay, Robinson distinguishes "enchantment" from "amusement" asserting that "enchantment" disrupts the usual tempo to allow for the recognition of wonder and surprise, fostering critical thinking (2017, p. 229). A pause to admit the "change in body" in such surprise, to think about what is going on in such wonder, is an act of care. We do not have space to care (about/for/with others) in the smoothness of feeling and enclosed contentment.

The openness to surprise and wonder is at the core of reparative reading, as outlined by Sedgwick. The approach Sedgwick discusses pertains to the way we engage with textual material, but it is applicable to all objects and even "human," as if we see everything and everyone as text. Sedgwick explains that "to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious, paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new." Therefore, a reader's reparatively positioned "has room to realize that the future may be different from the present; it is also possible for them to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did" (2003, p. 146). Considering that possibility is hope, but not in the dominant narrative of merely "getting along better" (Robinson, 2017, p. 224). Rather, it arises from the "depressive position" from which one can use one's own resources to assemble or repair the murderous part-objects into something resembling a whole (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 128). According to Robinson (2017, p. 219), the reparative ways of "writing" for Indigenous people involve songs and other performance works that serve as equivalents to legal expressions of land title, enact forms of diplomacy between nations, and convey knowledge about the land—what might be called "song acts" and "dance acts".

The notion of hope nurtured through constant disruptions of normativity challenges the "unity in diversity" policy and regional administrative hierarchies operated by the Vietnamese government. In this context, the acknowledgment of diversity serves to suppress distinctions within the nation to gain solidarity as a whole, and to a certain extent, against other communities. In other words, the current strategy of the Vietnamese state promotes the prioritization of citizenship over ethnicity, leading to a deliberate separation between domestic ethnic groups and their diasporas. Decades of assimilative efforts, including but not limited to restrictions on accessing Indigenous language education, stigmatization of cultural and spiritual practices, and the replacement of Indigenous customs with foreign ways of living (e.g., performing newly invented Cham dances in Cham temples that have no relation to Cham community's culture), have established concrete "norms" in Vietnam. Therefore, drastic changes in mindset and courage are required to enact cultural resurgence. Bearing in mind the distinction between the state's approach in the "hope for unity" built upon the neutralization of differences and the "hope" born out of disruption, we should approach relationships with Ethnic Minorities by embracing the "clash" of worldviews. This moment of "clash" is key to opening a new future.

Togetherness is distinct from sameness

The "enchantment" evoked by round dancing conveys "friendly invitations to join the action of moving together" (Robinson, 2017, p. 233). However, it is essential to bear in mind that emotions in their very intensity such as "enchantment" also involve "miscommunication," such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we do not necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling (Ahmed, 2004, p. 11). According to Ahmed, it is not the circulation of "an emotion" among us and makes us feel the same, rather, it is an object sticky or saturated with affects that circulate. The repetition of effect on objects shapes the surface of bodies as well as the social forms, such as the family, heterosexuality, the nation, even civilization itself. The miscommunication stems from the displacement between objects of emotion and the words of emotion (Ahmed, 2004, p. 13). In the intense moment of "enchantment" for instance, the experience of being "enchanted" can vary among different individuals, and the word "enchantment" can be interpreted differently based on individual backgrounds, perspectives, and emotional histories in relation to the Indigenous people (the object). This perspective highlights the importance of considering language and lived experiences to understand "care" and specific affect/emotion. Each community and individual may have different care practices and interpretations of caring acts. This does not mean that "care" and "affect/emotion" cannot be felt together, but rather emphasizes that "togetherness" does not equate to "sameness".

The recognition of such "miscommunication" potentiality is ambiguous in reality since it involves the messiness of others' lived experiences. My experience in recent virtual interviews with Ethnic Minorities can be seen as an example. Most of my participants were doing something else while joining my interviews. One was taking care of her child in the hospital and then riding a motorbike, another was joining a community gathering, and another was feeding his baby. I had to repeat some questions more than twice. My transcripts were mixed with Kinh and their Indigenous languages when they talked to people around them. My husband, sometimes walking past me, told me how he felt paranoid about their disengagement, distractions, and interruptions. From the worldview of people like my husband and me, who were born and raised in urban settings and are well-versed in so-called "professional" working manners, "multitasking" is viewed as not putting in enough attention and care. If I were fixated on that perspective, even if they told me that our interview had "so much joy," I would not believe them and assume it was a little-white-lie. However, "the joy" in their worldview is simply an opportunity to "chat" with a new friend, someone who knows someone they know, to not only answer the given questions but also spontaneously share the happenings of their everyday life in that very moment. Acknowledging that, I can also feel "the joy," but mine came from the appreciation that they invited me to join their daily activities even on a virtual platform. To summarize this example under Ahmed's argument, both my participants and I experienced "the joy" and "multitasking acts" in our conversation, but our "interpretations" of joy and perception of "multitasking" as *care or not* are different. Also, if my husband had joined the conversation, his interpretation and perception of shared emotion and caring acts would be distinct from both my participants' and mine.

Care-relational justice

Crean's article seeks to enhance the sociological understanding of affective relations within the context of care and social justice. It advocates for an expansion of the three-dimensional redistribution/recognition/representation theory of justice (Fraser, 2003, 2008, as cited in Crean, 2020, p. 54) to incorporate a fourth dimension, relational justice. The oversight of affective relations stems from the framing of the ontological "who" of social justice within Fraser's paradigm, primarily as an independent adult. Additionally, the concept of the "who" of social injustice is grounded in an individualist rather than a relational understanding of the person. The limitations on participatory parity posed by interdependency-defined relational identities are not fully articulated. It remains unclear how individuals highly dependent on others at a given time due to factors such as age, illness, and/or disability can achieve participatory parity.

Thinking through and with care represents a distinct epistemological perspective, offering an other-centered approach to understanding the world with the aim of addressing its injustices (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, as cited in Crean, 2020, p. 54). Affective care relations are not merely social derivatives subordinate to economic, political, or cultural relations within social life. Instead, they embody ethically-informed, nurturing-led social relations that maintain distinctiveness and take on varied cultural manifestations. Their primary intent is to engage with and co-create others relationally in a non-alienating, non-exploitative manner (Crean, 2020, p. 58).

Care can be regarded as a form of "cultural residual" representing a realm of human life, experience, and achievement that the dominant culture often overlooks, suppresses, and fails to acknowledge for its political significance (Williams, 1977, p. 123–124, as cited in Crean, 2020, p. 62). However, affective care relations thrive in the subaltern realm of everyday life; they are the relationships through which individuals co-produce each other as human beings and are keenly aware of their significance (Crean, 2018, as cited in Crean, 2020, p. 62).

Recognizing the ethical-political reality of affective love, care, and solidarity as normative values and practices could not only lead to a new understanding of how the normative order shapes social actions, but also foster a transformation in public discourse about politics by bringing the visibility of care-related affective justice to the forefront intellectually and politically (Crean, 2020, p. 62). As Robinson argues, the seemingly awkward union of "enchantment and activism" (as an extraordinary affect and an enduring resistance) represents the very ambiguity at the heart of Idle No More's affective capacity to dismiss dismissal (2017, p. 226). The fourth dimension of justice contributes to academic and activist work concerning the rights of marginalized ethnic groups by highlighting the significance of emotions or affects in politics.

Conclusion

Given the absence of care as an affective form in the scholarship about Vietnam, where most research focuses on care-work as a familial responsibility or profession, this paper identifies similarities between Vietnam's traditional and socialist morality in maintaining "unity in diversity" and the moral approaches to multiculturalism in the West. Through this synthesis, there arises a need to explore alternative approaches to foster and sustain meaningful engagement in multicultural societies. The paper delves into substantial scholarship on feminist ethics of care and affect studies, examining the relationship between care and affect, the significance of "affective care" in engaging with "others" and its connection to activism and social

justice. By reviewing and synthesizing related literature on care ethics and affect studies, the paper attempts to open a way to see "affective care-relational" as a potential alternative ethical framework for engagement with Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, as well as other vulnerable populations.

As this paper is mostly drawn from literature and case studies in the West, it remains at a conceptual level of understanding and recommendation. Therefore, further research is necessary, particularly in discourse analysis and engagement with Ethnic Minority communities. This paper is written in the hope that it can pave the way for more research on the ethics of affective care-relations conducted in and about Vietnam.

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