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Editor's Note

Alma Mater – Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies continues to pursue its core mission by offering a wide academic perspective within the field of cultural studies. Encompassing disciplines from geography to sociology, from linguistics to literature, and from philosophy to history, the articles presented here reflect the richness and diversity of contemporary interdisciplinary research.

The studies brought together in this issue highlight, from different angles, the wealth generated by an interdisciplinary approach. Ranging from AI-based language education and pedagogical practices, to the cultural metaphors of literature; from forms of resistance developed in postcolonial societies through magical realism, to the representational power of photography during the colonial era, the variety of topics represented on these pages is striking. Themes such as the relationship between monumentality and memory in historical spaces, the social and moral dimensions of medieval poetry, the multilayered functions of symbolic elements in art history, and the spatial reflections of ideology in modern cinema stand out as the focal points of this volume.

At the same time, research shedding light on lesser-known aspects of colonial history, literary and artistic analyses engaging with the socio-cultural contexts of different geographies, and examinations of the forms of resistance and rejection produced through the language of literature and art collectively demonstrate how academic diversity provides fertile ground for discussion. This multiplicity enables both historical and contemporary issues to be debated through varied methodological perspectives, uniting a broad scholarly spectrum—spanning geography, sociology, literature, art, and cultural studies—within a holistic framework.

Reaching the third issue of our journal is a clear indication of its growing strength within the academic community and its service to scholarly endeavors. Over nearly two years of publication, *Alma Mater – Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies* has succeeded in being indexed by respected databases such as ZDB (Zeitschriften Datenbank, Germany), DNB (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Germany), EZB (Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek, Germany), ERIH+ (European Reference Index for Humanities and Social Sciences) and Index Copernicus. We are sincerely confident that with the distinguished contributions we will continue to receive, the journal will become even stronger and gain recognition in additional international indexes.

We are certain that this issue will offer valuable insights and encourage further academic dialogue. We warmly invite you to explore the engaging and thought-provoking research presented in these pages, and we look forward with great anticipation to continuing this academic conversation in the issues to come.

With our sincere gratitude and best wishes,

Editors-in-Chief
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Emrah Siyavuş
Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlker Yiğit
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habib Tekin

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Between Stone and Silence: Ephemerality, Monumentality, and Burial in 19th-Century San Juan

Bethany M. Wade[1]

Abstract

Scholars of the new, suburban burial grounds constructed in the nineteenth century have long imagined a tension between the monumental and ephemeral in the design and use of these sites. Ephemerality, in this framing, challenges the permanence of the monumental both in the construction of intentionally temporary public monuments and when architectural features designed to endure are destroyed. Navigating through interdisciplinary methodologies, including practice theory and spatial analysis, this article illuminates pivotal moments in the evolution of San Juan's first general cemetery. From clashes between imperial projects and local implementations to midcentury conflicts and substantial 1860s redesigns, the narrative uncovers a dance between permanence and transience. Embracing overlooked sources, innovative techniques, and experiential engagement with material spaces beyond traditional archival approaches, this methodological journey enriches our comprehension of 19th-century burial practices. Providing a captivating lens for understanding meaning-making processes, the fusion of materiality and practice theory not only revolutionizes our understanding of historical actors' choices but also offers a methodological roadmap for researchers navigating the complexities of historical cemetery studies. This paper emphasizes the importance of blending traditional and unconventional strategies for a holistic understanding of spatial dynamics and cultural practices, contributing not only to the exploration of 19th-century burial practices but also to methodological advancements in historical research.

Keywords: *Material Culture, Spatial Practice, Memory and Memorialization, Cemetery Studies, Puerto Rico.*

Introduction

Early on August 8th, 1867, a group of men gathered in the general cemetery of San Juan, Puerto Rico. They met to execute the first in a series of large-scale exhumations. A doctor, a city councilor, and the overseer of the burial ground carried the paperwork to record the details of their task. They were joined by workers: gravediggers who brought equipment to complete the day's manual labor. Throughout the morning they opened the designated graves and verified that the bodies were completely skeletonized. Two niches were left unopened as the occupants had died of smallpox; a handful of remains were transferred to private pantheons or ossuaries.[2] The bones of the rest were buried together in a common

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[2] A note on terminology. The term *panteón* is used to capture several different burial forms in 19th-century records. Depending on the context, it can refer to anything from an individual grave to the cemetery itself. For clarity, I use the term grave, burial, or interment when referring to individual burial. I use pantheon or

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trench. The grave goods—burial clothes, flowers, and occasional coffin fragments—were burned. This task took place six times over the next two months.[3] The ninety-five exhumations doubled the number of available graves in the cemetery, buying some breathing room as officials attempted to solve a space crisis that threatened the continued viability of the burial ground.

The general exhumation performed that morning was a significant turning point in the existence of the cemetery in San Juan. It interests me as a historian because it brings together three foci of my research: what spaces were built, how those spaces were used, and how space took on meaning. The cemetery had recently undergone major reforms which saw the addition of new burial options, including in-ground burial, rental niches, and perpetual family mausoleums. This spatial restructuring coincided with the codification of new burial and exhumation practices, both private, when kin requested to relocate a loved one to a family memorial, and public, when cemetery officials emptied graves to reclaim space. And yet, while it represents a critical juncture in which novel material and cultural practices emerged, that morning's activities left barely a trace in the archive. In this article, I explore this archival limitation as well as the methodological and practical approaches to the archive and material space that allow me to reveal the cumulative choices that remade the place of the dead.

While my larger research addresses the material and cultural practices of death and dying more broadly, here I focus on the conundrum of space. In studying the new general cemeteries built across the Atlantic World in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, I have had to productively engage with the fact that any site coexisted in three forms: ideal space, material space, and ephemeral space. The ideal space often existed only as abstract, perfected forms in literature and design. This conception of a site, even though it was rarely built, leaves a heavy archival trace through plans, drawings, and architectural designs. Material space, in contrast, is the real-world environment shaped by practical constraints on the ground. Ephemeral space is a more transient and sensory-focused domain, designed to be temporary. While both the material and ephemeral are part of the built environment, each, in their own way, is elusive in archival documents. I take a holistic approach that considers these three dimensions as interconnected parts of a single system.

This article presents an exploration of my methodology. First, I lay the foundation by articulating the overarching theories that shape my interdisciplinary approach. Next, I delve into the practical methods applied both within and beyond the archive's confines. I then illustrate my methods through case studies at pivotal moments in the evolution of San Juan's first general cemetery. In the first case study, I consider the clash between imperial projects and local implementations in the early-nineteenth century. Both permanence and temporality inform and shape the ideal and the material aspects of San Juan's new burial ground. I next move to midcentury, exploring the conflicts and regulatory efforts that unfolded as authorities sought to reform the general cemetery. A lack of permanent features gave rise to informal uses of the space. This segment exposes the tension between the idealized use of the cemetery and the lived practices that unfolded

tomb when referring to the simpler, more basic structure. I use mausoleum or family crypt when referencing the more elaborate monuments built later in the process. Finally, ossuary refers to a location where the desiccated bones are placed after exhumation. These can take multiple forms, either private sites incorporated into family plots or public sites used by the general population.

[3] August 8, August 12, August 24, September 4, September 23, October 1, 1867, Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR), Municipio de San Juan (MSJ), Sanidad (S), Cementerios (C), legajo (leg.) 131 P1, expediente (exp.) 33.

within its bounds. Finally, I look to the 1860s—a decade marked by substantial efforts at large-scale cemetery redesign. New material features emerged, accompanied by novel practices that consolidated the cemetery's social role as a place of remembrance and memorialization. This journey unveils a nuanced dance between the permanent and temporary, showcasing how ideal, material, and ephemeral components interacted to shape meaning within San Juan's burial ground.

Actions and Objects: Towards a Methodology of Practice and Materiality

My project centers around the analysis of urban cemeteries and their roles within cities. An urban cemetery presents a unique object of analysis—it serves multiple functions and represents divergent meanings for different users. As both a work of art and a public works, it is a communal space, as well as a location for private reflection. Simultaneously spiritual and mundane, cemeteries pose a challenge for study due to their dual nature: objects weighted in their physical and tactile nature, and ideas constructed in a complex network of symbols. All three elements of space—the ideal, the material, and the ephemeral—coexist in the interstices between the abstract and the real. To navigate these complexities, I developed a mixed-methods approach that blends practice theory, material and spatial analysis, and social and cultural historical approaches.

I draw on twentieth-century cultural theories while remaining attentive to the limitations of these analytical approaches. Foucault's engagement with discourse may have opened the door for new questions, but the all-encompassing nature of power inherent in his model leaves little room for historical actors. Instead, it ascribes agency to a subject always-already subjected to power relations. For historians, the challenge lies in bridging the gap between individual actions and overarching structures. Practice theory offers a conceptual solution. Concurrent with Foucault's developing his theory of power, Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory of practice, focusing on the body's role in cultural production and social consumption. Like Foucault, Bourdieu explored power's connection to social stratification but reintroduced the agent's significance. Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* introduced concepts like fields, habitus, and capital, highlighting the dynamic nature of action over time (Bourdieu, 2013). Still, his focus remained primarily on the reproduction of class.

Sherry B. Ortner addressed this limitation by reexamining early European versions of practice theory in *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. She critiqued early versions for overemphasizing social reproduction and integrated three streams of thought—heightened attention to power dynamics, historicization, and an enriched view of culture—into her model (Ortner, 2006, pp. 10–18). Ortner's approach, maintaining Bourdieu's agency-structure connection while integrating power, history, and culture, provides a versatile method for studying the reproduction of social structures and the potential for change. Today's practice theory centers on understanding social behavior and culture through human actions and routines in specific contexts. Practice theory explores how individuals and groups engage with their environments, both material and social, influencing the construction and preservation of cultural norms, values, and systems.

Practice theory incorporates ethnographic study as a vital component. While this may be suited to anthropological and sociological studies, for the historian working from the archive it can pose challenges. Practice is frequently an informal interaction involving people and their environment; it does not find its way into the record. In the absence of

bodies in motion, or informants to interview, how can a historian access the spectrum of practices in a given historical moment? Let us consider for a moment both Bourdieu and Ortner. They speak of practice as the actions of the individual in particular spaces through time. While their work emphasizes the action, there remains the question of space. A powerful argument can be made about the relevance of material culture, the objects that are left behind, to the study of social practice.

This brings me to a second component of my methodology, which considers the objects of death and dying. From Marx's *historical materialism* (Marx, 1904) to Horkheimer and Adorno's *cultural materialism* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002), there exists a wealth of conceptions of, and approaches to, the study of the material realm. My work emphasizes the approaches of material rhetoric—the study of how material objects and their physical characteristics have been used as persuasive tools in communication throughout history. Artifacts, such as architecture, clothing, and other tangible items, can convey messages, values, and ideologies as effectively as written or spoken words. The recent interest in the study of "things" shows the potential of this approach. In *the Social Life of Things,* Arjun Appadurai advises:

> …we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context (Appadurai, 1986, p. 5).

Appadurai, while concentrating on commodities, points to the value of studying material culture as a means of expanding the idea of practice.

Lorraine Daston's *Things That Talk* moves the study of things past Appadurai's focus on commodities. Here, practice is integral to the study of material history. She urges the abandonment of studies predicated either on the "brute intransigence of matter, everywhere and always the same," or the inverse, which focuses solely on of "the plasticity of meaning" (Daston, 2004, p. 16). Instead, she conceptualizes material objects—things—as the "nodes at which matter and meaning intersect." Meanings are historically contingent and change as they incorporate new influences. Repeated human interactions with material objects create a cultural milieu in which things demonstrate a property similar to that of crystal formation in supersaturated liquids (Daston, 2004, p. 19). Things are the seeds around which a meaning "can suddenly congeal… crystalliz[ing] ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Daston, 2004, p. 20). The repetition of patterns within social discourse, the association of objects with particular social groups, the reference to classical forms, and the use of objects in a particular manner are all components upon which the conceptual existence of objects is built. The combination of actions varies with each object, but what remains consistent is a slow and sustained accrual of values that eventually coalesces into a new and unique meaning mapped onto the physical form. In drawing on these theoretical models, my approach works to understand how San Juan's burial ground took on meaning by recreating the "supersaturated" cultural solution.

Paper and Space: Practical Methods in the Archive and Beyond

To understand how the spaces of the deceased acquired meaning and how this meaning evolved, my methodology examines both practice and the object in the spaces of the dead. I trace not only the actions of individuals but also the role played by material objects. Implementing this approach necessitates an expansive conception of the archive. Practice—the quotidian actions of individuals—is often absent from the textual record.

Similarly, the records of burial culture see ideal objects and spaces overrepresented while the practical and intangible qualities go overlooked. To overcome these limitations means blending traditional archival strategies with overlooked sources, applying innovative techniques, and going outside the textual archive to recreate the plurality of experiences that informed emergent meanings around death and burial.

Applying quantitative and qualitative techniques, I combine both broad and deep analysis of varied source material. First, I provide a broad framework for reforms across the Spanish Empire by looking at three sets of documents: eighteenth-century Spanish religious and secular literature on cemetery reform, the legislation this generated, and the subsequent projects for new urban cemeteries. I then turn to a deep analysis of the cemetery project in San Juan. By examining what the inhabitants of the city—alone and in groups—said, did, and thought at pivotal points in this process, I shed light on the local specificities that shaped the trajectory of reform. I establish the evolving institutional concerns central to the project by drawing on the letters of bishops, governors general, and captains general, alongside the reports of city councils, sanitation boards, planning committees, and regulatory bodies. These approaches follow established methodologies of the social history of cemetery reform, establishing what people in the city did and built. I further engage a cultural approach that asks what these acts meant. Using wills, I look at what individuals conceived of as critical in their own burial. I combine this with the underused sources of burial records, petitions for the exhumations and transport of bodies, and the monuments in the physical space itself, to approximate attitudes around death and burial.

My use of digital methods to perform spatial analysis is a key departure from traditional approaches. From parish interment records, I constructed a database of over 8000 burials that took place during the reform process. It contains information on the deceased's age, race, legal status, as well as birth and marital status. It also captures key details of their burial, including sacraments, location of burial, funeral rituals, and details of their wills. I geocoded these entries, allowing me to map burial across the city, and within the cemetery. This database uncovers the relationship of race, gender, and class in a hierarchy of burial. Using these digital techniques, I reconstruct the collective practices of burial in the population even in the absence of detailed records of individual actions.

Finally, material space serves as a wellspring of insight. Archival documents, while invaluable, fall short of encapsulating the essence of lived environments. To truly grasp the depth of a space's affective and experiential dimensions, one must go beyond merely examining designs within the archive. It necessitates embarking on the same paths that bodies and mourners once traversed. A mere centimeter on a map cannot convey the scorching heat of an August day, nor can it elucidate why the logistics of transportation were such a paramount concern in a world prior to embalming practices. Debates over perimeter walls documented in municipal records offer only a fragment of the narrative. To truly comprehend the significance, one must stand on the cliffs just beyond the cemetery walls, feeling the relentless wind and witnessing the distant rocks below. This visceral experience unveils layers of meaning that words and records alone cannot capture.

The fusion of materiality and practice theory provides an intriguing vantage point for considering historians' processes of meaning-making. When we consider the rhetoric of the archive and the practice of finding and analyzing archival documents, we begin to recognize how our immersion in Western academic traditions becomes an integral part of our scholarly identity. We must acknowledge that our position within the global knowledge production system inevitably influences the nature of our scholarly contributions. I cannot

help but think of Lara Putnam's discussion of the benefits of the "externalities" involved in in-country archival research. "Things happen in archives and national libraries and on the way to them" that transform the researcher. In addition, interacting with local experts contributes to academics' exposure to the plenitude of non-Western knowledge centers, and forces a recognition of "one's ignorance early and often" (Putnam, 2016, p. 395). The experiential friction of engaging with the material spaces in which history transpired has the capacity to revolutionize our understanding of the choices of historical actors. In the case studies below, I work to make visible how all these approaches play a role in my process.

Monumental Imperial Projects versus Provisional Local Implementation

Old San Juan sits on an islet jutting into the ocean. The narrow grid of streets remains largely unchanged from its colonial layout. During my initial research trip on the island, I leased a studio apartment in the city center. My first weekend, equipped with Google Maps' most direct path, I set out to locate the object of my study: the Cementerio Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis. Following cobblestone streets uphill, I traversed the city toward the tip of the islet. Despite the early hour, sweat trickled down my spine. Upon reaching the top of the roadway, I encountered a wide expanse of green lawn. At the far end loomed the fortress El Morro. However, the cemetery was nowhere in sight. After wandering this park in confusion, I spotted it: a disembodied dome topped with a cross. Despite the illusion of the two-dimensional map, the cemetery lay not next to the fortress but below it. Retracing my steps, I found a small street sharply diverging from the main route. Narrow and winding, it descended beneath the city walls. I would learn to be cautious navigating this tunnel, as it was barely wide enough for the cars which whipped through at high speeds. On the far side I arrived at the cemetery gates. While this entrance is a later addition, the path I traversed was the same that countless bodies followed on their way to the grave. While the cemetery has transformed in 200+ years of active use, its location, neither prominent nor practical to my modern sensibilities, has remained the same. This initial case study centers on the first iteration of this burial ground as it was opened in the early nineteenth century.

The transition to general cemeteries in the nineteenth century did not take place in a linear or mechanical way. Instead, the adoption of modern systems was a conflicted and contingent process across the Atlantic World. Social traditions, imperial ambitions, and local conditions resulted in diverse cemetery forms. In distinct regional styles, the designers of these cemeteries sought to create spaces that would evoke feelings of solemnity and reverence.[4] The Spanish states' desire to transition to *extramuros* general cemeteries across the Empire was mediated by local conditions. In this section, I analyze how different conceptions of space – the ideal, the material, and the ephemeral – played a role in shaping cemetery development in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I focus on the practical aspects of

[4] For considerations of the emergence of 18th- and 19th-century cemeteries, see Ariès (1974), Curl (2002), and Ragon (1983).

cemetery design, both for hygienic and religious purposes, and how these factors became integral to the notion of respectable Catholic burial practices.

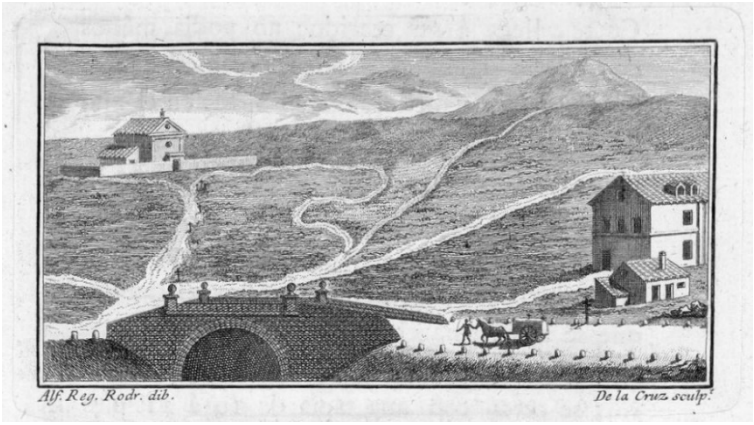

Figure 1: Intended form of extramuros general cemeteries in the Spanish Empire. (*Noticia del establecimiento*, 1787, p. 7).

During the 18th century, churchyard burial grounds became recognized as threats to urban health due to their association with disease and epidemics. Across the Atlantic World, cities began transitioning from traditional churchyard burials to general cemeteries.[5] King Carlos III began this reform process in the Spanish Empire when, in 1787, he issued a cedula prohibiting burials in churches and mandating the creation of *extramuros* (extramural) cemeteries. His intention was clear: Catholic Spain was to build general cemeteries that served the interests of both Religion and Public Health (Carlos III, 1787). Nevertheless, many municipalities cited financial constraints, land shortages, and reticence in the population as barriers to implementing changes. Instead, provisional cemeteries were opened to service short-term increases in the number of dead created by epidemics and military conflicts; these were closed after the crisis (Pérez García, 2015). It took 70 years for most Spanish towns to transition permanently to general cemeteries.

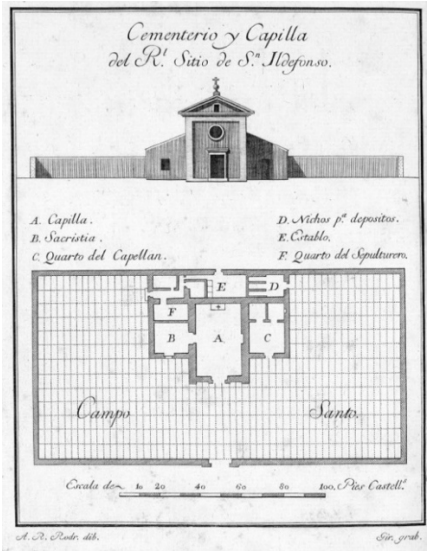

Figure 2: Proposed plan for the design of new general cemeteries. (Frontispiece, *Noticia del establecimiento,* 1787).

[5] For discussions of some of the regional variations in the construction of new general cemeteries, see Bermejo Lorenzo (1998), Legacey (2019), Malone (2017), Reis (2003), Rugg (2015), and Voekel (2002).

In 1804, Carlos IV issued a new edict to address the failure of his father's burial reforms. It again prohibited interments in churches and ordered the construction of general cemeteries. The edict also contained a design plan upon which municipalities could model their new burial grounds. For the first time, the Spanish state made its vision of a monumental cemetery clear. It included practical elements such as a sturdy fence, grand entrance, geometric grid divided by roads, and management buildings. The design also featured religious sites such as a sacristy, chapel, and ossuary.[6] Still, many cities failed to comply until 1813, when new legislation required compliance with existing laws within one month, including an absolute ban on church burial and the construction of hygienic cemeteries away from the population.[7]

In San Juan, officials had put off the construction of a new cemetery for decades. Each time Madrid issued new legislation, the municipal council found logistical reasons to justify the delay. The new edict ended this. However, it arrived in a moment of bitter conflict between civil and ecclesiastical officials. Governor Salvador Meléndez Bruna and Bishop Juan Alejo de Arizmendi were entangled in a power struggle over the extent of civil authority in ecclesiastical affairs. Burial reform was one arena where this larger struggle played out.[8] Although Arizmendi had previously supported construction of general cemeteries, he now publicly campaigned against their introduction to the island.[9] Meléndez and municipal authorities used the 1813 edict to exclude the bishop from the process.[10]

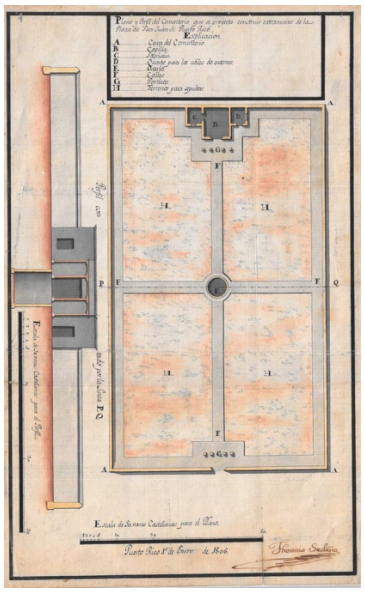

Figure 3: This 1806 design for the general cemetery planned for outside the walls of San Juan closely follows Charles IV 1804 ideal layout.[11]

[6] Carlos IV, Real Cedula, April 13, 1804, Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Indiferente 666ª, Real Cedulas, Orden, y Circular 1800–1805; "Plano de los cementerios y capillas que pueden establecerse en los extremos de las poblaciones," 1804, Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Sección de Ultramar (U), leg. MPD3424.
[7] Real Orden, November 1, 1813, AGPR, Records of the Spanish Governors (SG), leg. 10, exp. 8-A.
[8] On the conflict between Meléndez and Arizmendi, see Rodríguez León & Alegria (2004).
[9] Arizmendi to Meléndez, July 30, 1810, AGPR, SG, caja 10, exp. 8-A.
[10] José Batlle Espina to city council, July 18, 1813, AGI, Gobierno (G), Santo Domingo (SD), 2416; Antonio de Vegas to city council, October 19, 1813, AGPR, SG, leg. 10, exp. 8-A; Correspondence between Meléndez and Arizmendi, 1813-1814, AGI, G, SD, 2416.
[11] Thomas Sedeño, "Plano y Perfil del Cementerio que se proyecta construir extramuros de la Plaza de San Juan," January 1, 1806, AGPR, Mapoteca, gaveta 26, plano número 557.

The council moved ahead with the project. They were well-versed in the ideal cemeteries imagined by officials in Madrid. Indeed, multiple architectural plans show how city officials envisioned a local iteration of the imperial design. These plans replicate the design sent in Carlos IV's cedula of 1804.[12] It is a design showing the suggested location of this cemetery that is of note. It centrally features the "permanent" cemetery; however, in the bottom right corner a small line denotes a "provisional" site.[13] The geometric layout of the permanent was never built, instead, the temporary site—irregularly shaped to fit the available space—was opened for use.

The council constructed a provisional cemetery in the shadow of the Castillo San Felipe del Morro, high on the cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Situated on a narrow strip of land, the site was bordered on one side by the fortifications and on the other by the cliff face. This cemetery was little more than a simple wooden fence erected to enclose a rough field (Caro Costas, 1966, pp. 54–58).

Arizmendi deemed it unsuitable for Catholic burial. The space was insufficiently enclosed, exposing it to profanation. Wood from the fence was being stolen for firewood, and this compromised barricade allowed the incursion of dogs and animals from nearby slaughterhouses. Unchecked, these animals would desecrate the newly buried and carry off the bones of the dead. The bishop refused to bless the site until these issues were resolved.[14] Intent on getting the cemetery opened, the town council made concessions after contentious negotiations with the diocese. Councilmembers made enough improvements to meet the legal requirements and demanded that the diocese, "*en nombre de la ley,*" set the benediction date within three days.[15] While church officials complied, neither the bishop nor high-ranking members of his administration attended the ceremony.[16]

Having lost the battle over cemetery construction, Bishop Arizmendi continued to publicly criticize the new burial ground. His letter to all the island's parish priests emphasized the need for sacral infrastructure to preserve the spiritual benefits of prayers and masses. He insisted on a chapel and altar suitable for Catholic rites.[17] In response, the council commissioned a plan for the division of space within the provisional site.[18] In it, a chapel was prominently located and encircled by a small plaza. The plan also imposed a grid inside the uneven footprint of the cemetery. Religious, civil, military, and social distinctions were recognized in the most prominent section, closest to the chapel. A wall divided this from the much larger section that extended to the cliffs, designated simply for "*panteones para el pueblo.*"[19] The council aimed to imbue the site with respectability by promising to incorporate key elements of monumental cemetery design, although this plan was never put into action. What this initial period of construction shows is the distance between an

[12] Ignacio Mascaró, "Plano de los cementerios y capillas que pueden establecerse en los extramuros de las poblaciones," May 31, 1814, AGI, SD, Mapas y Planos (MP) 709; Ignacio Mascaró, "Plano y perfil del cementerio que se proyecta construir extramuros de la Plaza de San Juan de Puerto Rico," May 31, 1814, AGI, SD, MP 707.

[13] "Plano y perfiles en que se manifiesta el pie de la muralla desde el ángulo flanqueado del baluarte de Santo Domingo hasta el de San Antonio," May 31, 1814, AGI, SD, MP 708.

[14] Bishop Arizmendi to Governor Meléndez, May 18, 1814, AGI, SD, 2416.

[15] Correspondence between Provisor and Vicar General Gutiérrez del Arroyo and the city council, April-May 1814; Gutiérrez del Arroyo to Governor Meléndez, May 25, 1814, AGI, SD, 2416.

[16] May 27, 1814, Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan (AHA), Archivo Parroquial Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (APNSR), Libro 21 de entierros, 1812-1815; Acta de bendición, May 27, 1814, AGPR, Sección de planos, E15, 220.

[17] Bishop Arizmendi to parishes, May 24, 1814, AHA, APNSR, Disciplinar, caja 116.

[18] Governor Meléndez to city council, June 22, 1814, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96-P1, exp. 1.

[19] Ignacio Mascaró to city council and Governor Meléndez, June 21, 1814, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96-P1, exp. 1.

ideal and the built space, as local realities take precedence over abstract conceptions of space.

Informality and the Ephemeral | Reforms of the 1850s

After I finally located the cemetery, it became my habit to spend time there. Some afternoons I spent photographing and documenting features and locations uncovered in my archival research. Other days passed in solitary observation, experiencing the burial ground as both a natural and social space. The ocean breakers on the cliffs below blanket the site with a dull roar, contributing to a sense of isolation. Indeed, a constant sea wind blows through the site, causing even the hottest summer afternoon to feel manageable. While no livestock or dogs roamed—a very 19th-century concern—I befriended at least three cats living on the grounds. More than once I rounded the corner of a crumbling tomb and came face to face with an alarmingly large (to my eyes) iguana. The cemetery teemed with critters, sharing space with the living and the dead.

Figure 4: The children's tree, festooned with toys, lies near the entrance of the cemetery. Photograph from author's personal collection, 2017.

Living individuals occupied the site in various ways. Tourists quickly passed through, photographing marble angels and the central chapel as they went. Families seemed to occupy a different plane: moving slowly and spending time. An older woman, shaded by an umbrella, directed younger companions in cleaning a grave and replacing withered flower arrangements. Myriad markers of memorial practice filled the burial ground. Over the years, every inch of space has been claimed for burials, leaving a concrete and marble necropolis largely devoid of trees. An exception is the haunting *árbol de los niños* (the children's tree), decorated yearly with brightly colored toys, though official records provide little information. All of these things contribute to the character of the cemetery today, yet few are documented. This case study explores how intangibles of practice informed and shaped the material site in the mid-nineteenth century.

This section is centered on the reforms of the 1850s within San Juan's cemetery. Here I reveal the intricate dynamics between informal burial practices, material elements of the cemetery, and the conceptualization of space. In mapping the evolving landscape of San Juan's cemetery, I uncover how individual actions and official responses shaped the cemetery's development. Through new record-keeping practices, oversight, and the introduction of new burial infrastructure, I trace the municipality's efforts to address the challenges posed by informal practices and economic disparities while reshaping the cemetery's material and spatial dimensions. This case study serves as a testament to the

effectiveness of my interdisciplinary approach in unraveling the complexities of cemetery transformation and the multifaceted interplay between practice, materiality, and space.

The San Juan burial ground constructed in 1814 was never intended to last. Although the diocese negotiated improvements, the provisional cemetery remained little more than a neglected, asymmetrical field enclosed with a simple masonry fence. Complaints to Madrid recounted a litany of shortcomings: dogs exhumed and desecrated the graves; nearby slaughterhouses contaminated the air; and during storms, bodies washed into the ocean.[20] Civil authorities faced the "passive resistance" of the clergy and general population towards the space for decades (López de Victoria, 1998, p. 92). When conditions became too decrepit to be ignored, councilors approved several improvement projects. Initiatives in the 1840s included fortifying the walls, gates, and access road, as well as introducing religious elements like an ossuary and a wooden chapel, which also served as a *depósito* (holding area for bodies). A stone autopsy suite was proposed, driven by concerns over public health. These undertakings, while addressing immediate needs, were marked by their ad-hoc nature. While this generated an abundance of textual records in the archive, few material traces persist from this period.[21] The construction materials proved inadequate for the harsh coastal environment, demonstrating the liminal nature of the cemetery's development. It transitioned from a provisional space to one with more enduring features through a series of pragmatic, rather than planned, interventions.[22]

The additions of the 1840s were driven by necessity. However, once officials started paying attention, they discovered disturbing disorders and abuses. Officials on site during infrastructure work in 1842 observed illegal burial practices. For a price, "a couple of men" were extracting remains from tombs early in order to inter new bodies. The grave's contents, including the remains, clothes, and grave goods, were discarded in the dirt.[23] In the absence of infrastructure and oversight, an informal burial economy emerged. This illegal use of space led to the addition of formal elements in the general cemetery.

The council appointed a series of *celadors* (overseers) with a mandate to stop the "disorders and abuses" that had come to light.[24] Among other things, these overseers began tracking all income and expenses of the site; these were the first systematic cemetery records.[25] Over time, this careful record-keeping raised questions about the site's fiscal realities. The council felt the cemetery should generate income; instead, year after year, it failed to cover upkeep costs. Councilors became suspicious that, once again, illegal use of space was defrauding the municipality of the money needed to pay for much-needed repairs and construction work in the cemetery.[26]

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[20] For examples of petitions sent to Madrid between 1816 and 1840, see: AGI, SD, leg. 500, exp. 963, 965; leg. 503, exp. 536, 537, 540-542; leg. 2524, exp. 1041; AGI, U, leg. 500, exp. 9516-9518; AHN, U, leg. 2005;

[21] Starting in 1840, the debates around costs, logistics, and design for each of these projects can be traced in the archival record. The municipality's records, specifically the collections Sanidad, Obras Públicas (OP), and Cementerios, all include aspects of the process.

[22] City Council, 1853, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131, P1, exp. 21.

[23] They were extracting bodies before the two-year legal burial period had passed. This two-year window was, according to the medical standards on this date, the minimum time required for the safe decomposition of the flesh. City council, September 18, 1842, AGPR, OP, leg. 62-D, exp. 3.

[24] Correspondence between Joaquín de Negra and Governor Santiago Méndez de Vigo, September 18-20, 1842, AGPR, OP, leg. 62-D, exp. 3.

[25] City council, August 12, 1846, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96 P1, exp. 1-B; Burial records, 1846-1849, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 14-18.

[26] City council, January 9, 1855, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 35.

Suspicions were confirmed when Antonio Fernández became overseer in March 1849. Most of the burials in the cemetery were inground, unmarked, and, for the city's poorest inhabitants, in common graves. Affluent families could establish private tombs by paying for the right to use the land on which they were built. Annual fees were required to maintain this privilege. Each tomb was intended for a single burial at a time, with a fee of two pesos for a two-year interment. Subsequent burials required payment of the same fee to the overseer. When Fernández compiled an inventory of the tombs, he found records for only one hundred and sixty of the roughly five hundred in existence. He noted that many families had paid the initial fee but did not keep up with subsequent payments.[27] Although these violations were widespread, they were minor compared to the black-market rental business that came to light.

In the absence of options for burial in the cemetery, an illicit system was being managed by individuals who had acquired rights to multiple tombs. A large and wealthy family might legitimately need two plots, but even the sizeable Dominican order only owned three. Fernández's investigations revealed that at least seven individuals owned four or more tombs. Pablo Abadía, Eulogio Abadía, Luis Guiara, and Teodora Pardo each owned more than ten. The Abadía family alone owned forty-eight, which accounted for roughly ten percent of the cemetery's total.[28] Not only had these individuals acquired multiple plots, but they also built multitiered pantheons on each and charged "excessive" rents for their use. The council found that these businessmen were stealing fees that families should pay to the cemetery, illegally diverting the much-needed funds required for ongoing construction and repair work.

Councilors took decisive steps to eliminate these abuses by confiscating all pantheons in 1855 and requiring families to provide proof that they were up to date on payments.[29] While this established a municipal monopoly on burial, it did not solve the lack of options that had created the demand in the first place. Therefore, the council turned to the construction of a new style of rental site: niches. These sturdy and efficient tombs promised to generate income that the council could use to pay for cemetery upkeep while elevating the overall appearance of the space, and an initial order of fifty niches was placed.[30] Building this new infrastructure in an active cemetery proved challenging. Existing burials made it impossible to implement the new design uniformly, as occupied graves needed to remain intact until the two-year minimum interment period passed. In one case, a new site needed to be found when undocumented burials were discovered in the land allotted for niches.[31] In another, uneven terrain made the generic design unfeasible and required expensive support walls be added for stability.[32] Despite setbacks, the municipality continued to order small groups of niches. The result was a haphazard mix of old construction, scattered niches, and generally chaotic use of land. This would prove to be only a temporary fix.

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[27] Antonio Fernández, *Matricula de panteones*, December 31, 1853, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 22.
[28] Ibid.
[29] City council, January 9, 1855, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 24.
[30] City council, October 10, 1855; Manuel Sicardó, October 10, 1855; Correspondence between city council and *Junta de Subastas,* October 30-December 31, 1855; City council to Manuel Sicardó, February 20, 1855; AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 24.
[31] Julian Pagani to city council, May 30 and August 1, 1856, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 24.
[32] Manuel Sicardó to city council, May 5, 1856; Médicos titulares de la ciudad to city council, May 30-August 13, 1856, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 24.

The Monumental and Ephemeral as Memorial Practice: The 1860s Reforms

Archival labor, grimy and physically taxing, can also be mind-numbingly tedious. To counter the monotony, I often walk the cities where I research. After working in the ecclesiastical archive in San Juan, I would pass through the old harbor gates and follow the path around the promontory of the islet. With the waves of the Atlantic on one side and towering defensive walls on the other, my companions were a colony of feral cats and my thoughts. Where the main path ends, a dirt trail leads up into the brush and, eventually, to the cliffs outside of the cemetery walls. Here, the gritty infrastructure of the site, the residue of old construction, broken urns, and shattered statuary offered a different perspective on the site. Indeed, I spent countless hours examining the cemetery from all angles. Often, I would attempt to track down the projects so urgently discussed in my records. The cemetery staff became my collaborators, shifting from puzzled curiosity about the odd Canadian spending so much time in the burial ground to enthusiastic guides and informants. Their stories, from divots in the walls caused by cannon fire to the oldest extant tomb, brought this space of death to life. It was not unusual for us to compare notes: contrasting the musty records of the past with the oral history of those who kept the space in modern times. This final section explores the reforms of the 1860s, marking the pivotal period that, for the first time, introduced the material and practical components still recognizable in the present-day cemetery.

In this case study, I examine the 1860s cemetery reforms, focusing on the changing perception of monumental elements. This period reflects the intersection of three space conceptions: "ideal space" representing municipal authorities' vision, "material space" defined by physical elements, and "ephemeral space" characterized by evolving burial practices. I unravel the nuances surrounding the transformation of the cemetery from a disreputable site to a place worthy of a "cultured and Christian" city. Municipal authorities, driven by urbanization and aspirations of the urban elite, undertook a phased project to modernize the cemetery. The deliberate use of material elements, changing cultural practices, and historical context culminated in the codification of the cemetery as a symbol of respectability. This section provides insight into the coexistence of harmonized forms of space, where the ephemeral, material, and ideal converge to shape the cemetery's transformation into a testament of social progress and cultural refinement.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Puerto Rican society was in transition. A growing urban elite of civically engaged businessmen, professionals, and merchants in San Juan was intent on advancing social changes that benefitted their class. Its members obtained positions on municipal councils that shaped the structures of daily life in the city. From these posts, they guided projects to modernize the city, transforming its architecture and spatial composition. This emergent middling class, acting through increasingly important institutions of municipal leadership, played a role in determining what—and who—was socially acceptable (Martínez Vergne, 1999, pp. 1–91; Matos Rodríguez, 1999, pp. 36–58). The monumental and ephemeral intersected to shape new material forms and practices in response to the evolving social hierarchy in the city.

By mid-century, officials in San Juan turned a critical eye on the space of burial. For fifty years, critics had complained that the cemetery space was in appalling condition. Now, the wooden chapel was disintegrating in the heavy salt spray, the road was treacherous, and the land inside uneven and unstable. The chaotic arrangement of niches and pantheons added to the disreputable atmosphere. The allegation that bodies washed into the sea

during storms again circulated in the city.[33] The conditions in the cemetery did not reflect the council's vision of a modern San Juan. Councilors embarked on a multi-phase project to improve conditions in the site, transforming it into one worthy of a "cultured and Christian" city.[34]

The first phase of the project completed much-needed work to construct walls, reinforce the land, and install drainage.[35] This was in line with previous municipal priorities: infrastructure and sanitation. In the second phase more prestigious elements were added. A large chapel in white concrete was built in a round central plaza. Interior roads intersecting at the chapel were laid out, and the street from the city to the cemetery repaired. Finally, a monumental gate was installed.[36] All of these were intended to add gravitas to the space, incorporating monumental components that had previously been overlooked.

The act of implementing a new cemetery design entailed the destruction of what had existed before, with old tombs and niches razed. This demolition paved the way for a new spatial arrangement, establishing the long-discussed hierarchy. The spatial reforms introduced a hierarchy, incorporating marble mausoleums for civil and ecclesiastical authorities, orderly banks of niches, and designated areas for family tombs.[37] Families and *cofradias* proving ownership were allocated space in the new system.[38] The city council controlled the remaining space, including an epidemic section, a "*campo de las fosas*" (area for inground burial), and 670 remaining niches.[39] This transformation represented a significant expenditure in San Juan's cemetery, aligning with the councilors' broader agenda of modernizing the city's urban landscape.

These new burial options coincided with evolving memorialization practices, shaping the significance of burial places. General cemeteries led to an increase in exhumations and relocations, reflecting shifts in family memorial practices linked to 19th-century national identity politics. Ties to a place were personal and linked to individual and family histories, with family pantheons becoming more popular. Family memorials symbolized kinship rooted in native soil, prompting efforts to repatriate the deceased (Pérez, 2005, pp. 66–71; Aramburu y Machado, 1901, p. 115). Permanence and transience played vital roles in the new material and ritual aspects of memorialization.

[33] Various cases and conflicts over these issues can be seen in: 1863-65, AGPR, OP, leg. 62, Caja 323; 1862-1863, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 131, P1, exp. 21.
[34] This phrase is used in documents discussing the proposed reform project, 1862, AGPR, OP, Caja 323, leg. 62D, exp. 4.
[35] The situation led to legal cases that continued from 1863 and 1880. AHNC, GG, leg. 344, exp. 16674.3; AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96 P1, exps. 1, 4; AGPR, OP, leg. 62-D, exps. 8, 8-3; AHN, U, leg. 379, exp. 14-16.
[36] 1862, AGPR, OP, leg. 62-D, exp. 4; 1863, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96, P1, exps. 3, 3-A.
[37] December 20, 1862, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96 P1, exp. 1.
[38] Cofradías were Catholic lay organizations that originated in medieval Spain. Individual cofradía were devoted to patron Saints or religious figures, and members came together to practice acts of piety and good works. Popular in colonial Latin America, they also served as mutual aid societies for different social and racial groups.
[39] October-November 1862, AGPR, MSJ, leg. 96 P1, exp. 1.

Figure 5: Photograph, features family mausoleums as well as crosses and markers for in-ground burials. *Bird's-eye view of the cemetery outside the city wall, San Juan, Puerto Rico*, (ca 1880).

Figure 6: General cemetery from same angle. Photograph from author's personal collection, 2017.

Among the elite, international relocation of deceased kin occurred.[40] In Puerto Rico, middle-class families increasingly moved bodies between cities or within a single cemetery.[41] Local-level exhumations and relocations became standard, leading the Ministerio de Gobernación to establish rules for a minimum two-year interment and medical certification for safe exhumations (Martínez Alcubilla, 1892, pp. 427–48). Large-scale exhumations became common due to space shortages.[42] In 1851, Spain issued guidelines to control exhumations, prohibiting mass exhumations and extending the minimum interment to five years (Martínez Alcubilla, 1892, pp. 429–430).

The transition from a two-year to a five-year burial period presented a logistical challenge for San Juan officials. Anticipating the cemetery would run out of space within a year, the city council collaborated with the governor to address short- and long-term challenges.[43]

[40] In this period, international moves were more common in the wealthier port city of Havana, Cuba. Based on 223 petitions to exhume and transfer bodies to and from Havana, Cuba and San Juan, Puerto Rico between 1853 and 1897 held in the AGI, AHN, AGPR, and the AHNC.

[41] For petitions relating to private exhumations in Puerto Rico between 1867 and 1896, see AGPR, MSJ, S, C, 131 P1, 131 P2, 131 P3, 131-A, 132 P1, 132 P2, 133-A, 133-B, and 133-C.

[42] In the churchyard system these mass exhumations, performed to reclaim burial space, were known as *las mondas de los huesos*. Spanish legislators utilize this term when formulating the new regulations. The new rules allowed for cemetery-wide exhumations, a practice in which multiple exhumations were performed at a time. However, each individual exhumation had to be documented and certified as safe.

[43] May 8, 1866, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 33.

The immediate task involved modifying existing leases from a two- to a five-year term. Families, friends, or representatives were given a two-month grace period to renew for three additional years or arrange private tomb transfers. Failure to comply would result in the council exhuming bones and burying them in a common trench.[44]

Families responded based on social and economic situations. Some simply could not afford the new costs. Carmen del Toro explained that her extreme poverty made it impossible for her to extend the lease on her late husband's niche.[45] Others who lacked the resources had friends willing to assist. While Doña Asunción Ramírez del Gragirena did not have the funds, Don José Caldas gave her permission to transfer her husband's remains to the Caldas family pantheon.[46] Some families chose existing family crypts or seized the opportunity to purchase land for new tombs. However, the most common response was no response at all. At the grace period's end, the governor authorized the council to begin exhumations, initiating the first general exhumation on August 8th, 1867.[47] Combined, the reforms in space and practice introduced an array of both permanent and limited tenure options to the public.

Place and permanence became the markers of status in the cemetery. Varied memorialization practices, incorporating monumental and ephemeral material culture and memorial practices, emerged in this new system. While there was no expectation that the individual burial would be permanent, these monuments symbolized family wealth and status. The competition for preferential burial plots laid the foundation for a developing real estate business. Wealthy families began purchasing—and selling—land in the cemetery. In 1866, Don Luis Rengal applied to purchase land for a mausoleum for his siblings and himself. Rengal noted that numerous kin were already buried in the cemetery; he wanted to transfer them all to this new family mausoleum.[48] In 1867, Don Eusebio Hernández petitioned to sell a pantheon he inherited, as his family already owned one in the burial ground.[49] These real estate transactions would become more frequent as time went on.

For the middling classes aspiring to showcase prestige in death without the exorbitant price tag, niches were the preferred choice. A perpetual niche had a high initial investment, but low ongoing costs.[50] Despite this, any form of perpetual site was cost-prohibitive. Renting temporary space was the prevalent practice, with costs ranging from twenty-five to seventy-five pesos based on the niche's proximity to the cemetery center. A limited number of niches at the chapel base were available to rent for one hundred and fifty pesos each. Location was not the only component that took on significance in memorial practice. While cemetery regulations dictated that all the niches would be the same in their construction, families were permitted to install an engraved marker for the duration of the

[44] *La Gazeta de Puerto Rico,* November 27, 1866, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, 4; Civil Governor to San Juan city council, May 21, 1867; Public replies regarding renewals, May 8-May 29, 1867, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 33.
[45] Carmen de Toro to Corregimiento de San Juan, May 29, 1867, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 33.
[46] Doña Asunción Ramírez del Gragirena to Corregimiento de San Juan, May 1867, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 33.
[47] Governor Superior Civil to city council, May 21, 1867, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 33.
[48] Don Luis Rengal to municipal authorities, 1866, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 38.
[49] Don Eusebio Hernández to municipal authorities, 1867, AGPR, MSJ, S, leg. 131 P1, exp. 42.
[50] Reglamentos, Capitulo 3ª, 1869, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 49.

rental period. Within a decade, it became customary to petition to install marble plaques to mark the location of the deceased.[51]

For every burial in a niche or mausoleum, four took place in the ground.[52] For those who used in-ground burial, a new tradition emerged. These families petitioned to erect markers on the site of the burial, often wooden crosses or simple stone markers. A second, related request was to build a fence encircling the grave. Permission came with the requirement that the marker and fencing be removed entirely at the end of the rental period.

Conclusion

My interdisciplinary methodology, which draws on practice theory, material rhetoric, and historical analysis, has proven to be an invaluable tool in unraveling the complexities of burial practices and memorialization within the context of San Juan's cemetery during the nineteenth century. By applying these lenses, I have gained a multifaceted understanding of how societal transitions, local conditions, and evolving cultural norms intersected to shape the cemetery's physical and symbolic landscapes. This methodology allowed me to move beyond a simple examination of historical events and instead delve into the underlying practices, material elements, and rhetorical devices that influenced the meaning-making process of the time.

Furthermore, my exploration of the different conceptions of space within the cemetery not only illuminated the multifaceted generation and contestation of meaning during this historical period but also significantly enriched my engagement with archival and material sources. By attentively considering the ideal, material, and ephemeral space, I was able to approach the diverse array of historical documents, physical artifacts, and spatial layouts with a more nuanced perspective. This approach facilitated a more productive analysis of the archival records, as it enabled me to discern how these various spatial conceptions influenced the documentation and material traces left behind. These varied conceptions of space provided a rich framework for comprehending the intricate layers of meaning embedded within the cemetery's historical context. It allowed me to unravel the complexities of burial practices, memorialization, and the evolving landscape of San Juan's cemetery in a holistic and comprehensive manner, thereby contributing to a more profound understanding of this historical moment.

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[51] For examples of petitions to erect *lápidas* on rental niches, see AGPR, MSJ, S, C, 131 A; 131 P2; 131 P3; 133; AGPR, MSJ, 96 P2.

[52] Reglamentos, Capitulo 1º, 2º, and 4ª, 1869, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 49; Partidas de enterramientos, libro 1, 1871-1873; De nichos y panteones, libro 1, 1871-1878, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, caja 147; Pagos de panteones del cementerio de la capital, 1877, AGPR, MSJ, S, C, leg. 131 P1, exp. 49.

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"These Fragments I Have Shored": Literature, Pop Music, and the Ruins of Empire in Post-War Britain

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Abstract

This essay examines how literature and popular music documented and shaped Britain's transformation from military empire to cultural soft power in the post-World War II era. Through analysis of three pivotal cultural moments—Sam Selvon's The Lonely Londoners (1956), the Beatles' Revolver (1966) and Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967), and Zadie Smith's White Teeth (2000)—the study traces Britain's evolution from imperial certainty through post-colonial anxiety to multicultural complexity. Selvon's novel exposes the gap between Britain's self-image as a tolerant Commonwealth and the lived reality of Caribbean immigrants facing what Moses calls "the old English diplomacy" of polite exclusion. The Beatles' revolutionary albums capture a nation learning to project global influence through cultural innovation rather than military force, transforming imperial imagery into psychedelic spectacle. Smith's millennial novel presents the multicultural Britain that emerged from these transformations while diagnosing tensions that would culminate in Brexit. Together, these works reveal how artistic production actively participated in constructing new narratives of British identity, using linguistic innovation and formal experimentation to challenge imperial hierarchies. The analysis demonstrates that Britain's transformation remains unfinished, with imperial structures persisting beneath multicultural celebrations, revealing fundamental contradictions about belonging, identity, and national mythology that continue to shape contemporary Britain.

Keywords: *The Lonely Londoners, The Beatles, White Teeth, British Empire, Post-Imperial Britain, Post-Colonial Literature*

Introduction: A Cultural Archive of Imperial Decline

The dissolution of the British Empire in the decades following World War II represents one of the most significant geopolitical transformations of the twentieth century. Yet this metamorphosis was not merely political or economic—it was fundamentally cultural, reshaping the very essence of British identity. As the Union Jack was lowered across former colonies and protectorates, Britain faced an existential question: what role could a small island nation play in a world it no longer dominated militarily or economically? The answer would emerge not from Westminster or Whitehall, but from the creative output of writers and musicians who documented, challenged, and ultimately reimagined what it meant to be British in a post-imperial age.

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Three cultural moments capture this transformation with particular clarity and power. Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) gave voice to the Caribbean immigrants who began arriving in the "mother country" just as its imperial authority was crumbling. A decade later, the Beatles' revolutionary albums *Revolver* (1966) and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) demonstrated how Britain could project global influence through cultural innovation rather than military might. At the millennium's turn, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) presented a multicultural Britain that had emerged from these transformations while diagnosing the tensions that would eventually lead to Brexit. Together, these works reveal how literature and popular music became the primary vehicles through which Britain negotiated its post-imperial identity, documenting not just what changed but how it felt to live through that change.

Part I: "Colour, is you that causing all this": Race, Immigration and the Elusive Ideal of Tolerance in Sam Selvon's The Lonely Londoners

Every nation, even to conceive of itself as such, must find its own place within what has conventionally been called the concert of civilizations. Some more peripheral nations—and I believe I can include my homeland, Brazil, in this category—often invest in constructing a national image grounded in more mundane aspects: creativity, the ability to do more with less, or culturally distinctive traits such as music or even a particular sport. In contrast, the great powers—those that see themselves as undisputed global leaders—tend to feel a natural calling to present themselves as bastions of higher ideals. The greater a nation's self-perception as a superpower, the stronger its perceived need to aspire to lofty, almost unattainable values. Just as the United States—despite its undeniable historical sins regarding race—has consistently positioned itself as a guardian of the highest standards of democracy, Britain, particularly after the loss of its imperial status, made significant efforts to project a new image to the world: that of a Commonwealth open to all, governed by principles of humanism, inclusion, and color-blindness. Unfortunately, the test of time and reality has shown that this ideal of tolerance, however noble, remains elusive.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, Sam Selvon sets out not only to depict the lives of Caribbean immigrants in postwar Britain but also to expose the gap between Britain's self-image as a tolerant, inclusive society and the lived realities of those who were supposedly welcomed by it. The novel, in many ways, dismantles the myth of British color-blindness by showing, in vivid, everyday detail, how racial exclusion and social marginalization operate beneath the surface of gentleness and liberalism. Selvon's narrative is not simply about what happens to his characters—it is about how their experiences are told. His unique use of language, blending Caribbean Creole with English in both narration and dialogue, serves as a manifesto: it challenges literary conventions, affirms the narrative authority of marginalized voices, and refuses to adopt the linguistic norms of the society that excludes them. In doing so, Selvon not only gives his boys a voice, but also a soul—a soul that exposes, through form as much as content, just how elusive Britain's ideal of tolerance truly was.

In a key passage of the novel, Galahad asks Moses for advice on how to navigate life in London as a newcomer. Moses warns him that, unlike in America where racism is explicit, in Britain prejudice hides behind politeness and, sometimes, cold indifference:

> 'All right mister London,' Galahad says, 'you been here for a long time, what you would advise me as a newcomer to do?'

> 'I would advise you to hustle a passage back home to Trinidad today,' Moses say, 'but I know you would never want to do that. So what I will tell you is this: take it easy. It had a time when I was first here, and when it only had a few West Indians in London, and things used to go good enough. These days, spades all over the place, and every shipload is big news, and the English people don't like the boys come to England to work and live.' 'Why is that?' Galahad ask.
>
> Well, as far as I could figure, they frighten that we get job in front of them, though that does never happen. The other thing is that they just don't like black people, and don't ask me why, because that is a question that bigger brains than mine trying to find out from way back.'
>
> Things as bad over here as in America?' Galahad ask.
>
> 'That is a point the boys always debating,' Moses say. 'Some say yes, and some say no. The thing is, in America they don't like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy: "thank you sir," and "how do you do" and that sort of thing. In America you see a sign telling you to keep off, but over here you don't see any, but when you go in the hotel or the restaurant they will politely tell you to haul--or else give you the cold treatment.' (Selvon 20–21).

The dialogue flows with the streetwise cadence of spoken word, imbuing Moses's observations with immediacy, warmth, and a certain cynicism. For him, the act of observation is an act of survival. Through this stylized yet intimate exchange, Selvon exposes the contradictions of British society: a nation that proclaims tolerance while subtly—and often silently—enforcing exclusion. Moses's reflections are particularly powerful because they contrast British racism not with an ideal, but with American bluntness. This duality—politeness masking prejudice—exposes the fugitive aspiration of tolerance at the heart of British postwar identity.

The power of Selvon's prose lies not just in what it says, but in how it says it. His linguistic choices are anything but casual. As Mervyn Morris notes, Selvon's narrative "mimics the music and movement of calypso, embedding emotion and resistance in the very texture of the prose" (Morris 74). In Moses's lines, the rhythms of observation are inseparable from the rhythms of exclusion: he watches through a pane of language as well as of space. If West Indian immigration is reshaping the racial structure of British society, why not contaminate its narrative language as well?

Selvon's prose and the way his characters speak stand in stark contrast to the restrained and self-deceiving world of Mr. Stevens, the main character and narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. As the butler of a once-grand English estate, Stevens embodies a class and cultural ethos that prizes dignity, emotional suppression, and an almost blind loyalty to an order in decline. When he recalls a conversation with Lord Darlington, who flirted with fascist ideologies (including an episode of discrimination against Jews), Stevens cannot bring himself to admit any moral failing: "It is, perhaps, a sign of the times that one is expected to keep up with the latest developments in world affairs" (Ishiguro 99). His cultivated blindness and preference for euphemism mirror the very "English diplomacy" Moses critiques—an attitude that sweeps racial and class injustices under the rug, hiding them behind a screen of politeness and tradition.

The contrast between these two works—written by authors with significant immigrant backgrounds, though in very different styles and published more than thirty years apart—is even more striking because both are set around the same moment: 1956, the year of the Suez Crisis, which for many marked the beginning of the end of the British Empire. Together, they offer vivid portraits of a nation in transition: Ishiguro's gray, hierarchical, and monolithic England slowly giving way to the colorful, chaotic, and multiracial Britain

of Selvon's novel. The twilight of the British Empire had come—but just ahead lay the outbreak of the British Invasion.

Later comes what is perhaps the most poignant passage in Selvon's novel, in which the character Sir Galahad stares at his own skin and begins to speak to it, as if it were a separate being. In this moment of raw introspection, Galahad gives voice to the psychological toll of racial exclusion:

> Though it used to have times when he lay down there on the bed in the basement room in the Water, and all the experiences like that come to him, and he say 'Lord, what it is we people do in this world that we have to suffer so? What it is we want that the white people and them find it so hard to give? A little work, a little food, a little place to sleep. We not asking for the sun, or the moon. We only want to get by, we don't even want to get on.' And Galahad would take his hand from under the blanket, as he lay there studying how the night before he was in the lavatory and two white fellars come in and say how these black bastards have the lavatory dirty, and they didn't know that he was there, and when he come out they say hello mate have a cigarette. And Galahad watch the colour of his hand, and talk to it, saying, 'Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world!' (Selvon 76)

This aching monologue captures the emotional core of Selvon's novel—a text that uses its rhetorical form to expose the harshness of racism in postwar Britain. *The Lonely Londoners* is not just a kind of documentary, in prose, of immigrant experiences; it is a work written in a rhythm, grammar, and tone that demand recognition. Through its language—and, more specifically, through the language of the voice it gives its characters—Selvon dramatizes how immigration reshapes the fading empire in general and the metropolis more specifically, and how myths of national tolerance often conceal structural exclusion.

Sir Galahad, once hopeful and proud upon arriving in the so-called mother country, gradually comes to see how his skin color—his "Colour"—has marked him as a target. His outburst in the cited passage exposes his painful realization of this condition. By anthropomorphizing his skin, Galahad externalizes the racism he cannot otherwise make sense of. Like his famous namesake from the Arthurian cycle, he searches for a Grail that seems unattainable—in his case, the utopia of social color-blindness. His rhetorical structure, built on repetition and direct second-person address, is incantatory: "is you… is you… is you." It captures both the internalization of racism and subtly mocks its absurd logic. Why can't the skin be blue? Why must the world invest so much meaning in a biological fact? Selvon offers no solution—only the raw articulation of the problem.

In any case, Selvon's depiction of race and exclusion cannot be fully understood without being set against the mystique of British anti-racism. As Kennetta Hammond Perry argues, "Britain's dominant self-conception as a nation that eschews racial antagonism has functioned to mask and deny the everyday operations of racism" (Perry 540). In *The Lonely Londoners*, this self-conception is repeatedly undermined. White Londoners rarely act with overt hostility; instead, they offer distance and polite indifference—the cold treatment, as the tests call it. One might be allowed into the country, but not into a neighbor's living room. In this way, Selvon dramatizes what it means to be tolerated but never welcomed, visible but never truly seen.

And yet, for all its sorrow, *The Lonely Londoners* is not a novel of despair—it is a novel of presence. It insists that these men existed, that they laughed, drank, danced, worked, loved, and even booed the God Save the Queen. Their stories make clear not only that they were

there and deserved to be seen, but also—and above all—that they had come to stay. Because the fact is, Britain would never be the same after the Windrush docked.

Part II: "Four Thousand Holes in Blackburn, Lancashire": The Beatles from the Twilight of the British Empire to the Outset of the British Invasion

If Selvon's novel captured the arrival of empire's subjects in the metropolis and their struggle for belonging in the 1950s, the following decade would witness Britain's discovery of a new form of cultural power. The same working-class energy that Selvon documented in the immigrant communities of London would find a different expression in the port city of Liverpool, where four young men were about to transform not just British culture but global consciousness. The Beatles emerged from a Britain that was learning to reimagine itself not through military might but through the irresistible force of popular culture. Their revolutionary albums of the mid-1960s would articulate the anxieties and possibilities of a nation in transition, creating a soundtrack for Britain's transformation from imperial power to cultural innovator.

When the Beatles released *Revolver* in 1966 and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967, they were not merely reshaping the history of pop music—they were also capturing the zeitgeist of the United Kingdom in the final stages of a profound national transition. These two albums encapsulated, both directly and metaphorically, the latent themes of imperial decline, generational rupture, and cultural redefinition more vividly than perhaps any other works of their time. As Britain definitively stepped away from its role as a global empire and sought a new identity as a soft power—exporting culture, fashion, lifestyle, and, most strikingly, music—the Beatles became the perfect chroniclers of that transformation. In this context, four key songs—"Taxman," "Eleanor Rigby," "She's Leaving Home," and "A Day in the Life"—may be read as particularly powerful representations of a nation that was, at times painfully, at times joyfully or ironically, reinventing itself. Through lyrics and compositions such as these, the Beatles emerged not only as icons of the Swinging Sixties and leading figures of the British Invasion, but as central participants in Britain's renegotiation of its place in the world.

The Beatles had already signaled an impressive artistic maturity with the album *Rubber Soul* in 1965, but it was with *Revolver* in 1966 that the band's awareness of their cultural significance became unmistakably clear. Though *Revolver* may not yet constitute a fully conceptual and unified project like *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* the following year, its musical and artistic ambition is undeniable—far surpassing anything else being done in popular music at the time. Not surprisingly, many critics still regard it as the Beatles' most musically accomplished album. What is most significant is that they chose this rupture at the group's peak as pop icons and symbols of their nation. So emblematic did they become of modern Britain that even James Bond—himself a cinematic symbol of "an age-old patriarchal order" in Britain (Berberich 20)—mentions the Beatles in the 1964 film *Goldfinger*.

It fell to the youngest Beatle, George Harrison, to open *Revolver*—and he didn't hold back. "Taxman," a sharp and sarcastic track that initially sounds like a love song but is actually a protest against Britain's high taxes, marked a turning point in the band's connection to their national identity. Written at the height of Beatlemania, the song reflects growing frustration with a postwar system that no longer seemed to make sense. Harrison's lyrics—"Let me tell you how it will be / There's one for you, nineteen for me"—come with a heavy dose of irony, and his follow-up line—"If you take a walk, I'll tax your feet"—makes

it clear how fed up people were with a bloated, outdated state that demanded more than it gave. The music matches the mood: driven by a sharp, punchy guitar riff and a distorted solo by Paul McCartney, the track feels tense and agitated. It's one of the first times the Beatles sound openly critical of Britain's direction. The spirit of the 1960s, then, wasn't random—it grew out of a deep sense that the old order was falling apart. And in that sense, "Taxman" is a political awakening—a song that captures exactly what many people were starting to feel.

With "Eleanor Rigby," the Beatles elevate pop to a new literary level, blending chamber music with stark social commentary. The use of a double string quartet, arranged by George Martin, was entirely unexpected in the context of 1960s pop. The lyrics are vivid, almost cinematic: "Eleanor Rigby / Picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been / Lives in a dream." The refrain—"All the lonely people / Where do they all come from?"—moves us not only through the melancholy of the characters it describes, but also through a kind of longing for what Britain once was. It speaks to a generation—and in many ways to a country—that was quietly vanishing before our eyes. Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie are ghosts of a fading empire. McCartney and the other Beatles, coming from a city with strong Catholic and Irish roots, could relate to these figures, but they also knew they were no longer of that world. Perhaps that's why the striking absence of their own instruments and harmonies in the song suggests a kind of withdrawal or distance. Martin—this paternal, almost Victorian figure—takes charge of the arrangement, reinforcing the generational tension at play. It's the sound of a Britain stripped of its former glory, marked by fragmented traditions and a diminished sense of identity. As Susan Kingsley Kent observes, "the 1960s marked the beginning of the breakdown in what had appeared to most Britons to be a postwar consensus about the appropriate nature of government and society" (Kent 335). Thus, Eleanor Rigby is not just about private grief; it can also be interpreted as a farewell song for the British sense of national pride and unity.

By adopting the persona of a fictional band on *Sgt. Pepper*, the Beatles placed themselves in a unique position to comment on the identity of post-imperial Britain—including their own public image. Wearing colorful military costumes adorned with emblems and medals from no real regiment, they playfully subverted traditional symbols of power. The iconic album cover—a tour-de-force collage of cultural and political figures from across the globe—can be read as an attempt to reduce empire to image, and history to pastiche. Marcus Collins notes that "The Beatles brought pop music from the margins of cultural discourse to its centre…. Yet their background, youth, education, commerciality, popular audience and stylistic promiscuity challenged critics to rethink the very definition of art and its function in society" (Collins 402). From that moment on, the group had become cultural ambassadors of a different order, projecting an image of Britain that was hip, irreverent, and constantly evolving. That is why one possible interpretation of the album cover is that it stages a funeral for the "old" Beatles, represented by their wax figures from Madame Tussauds. Though younger in appearance, these older versions of the band seem paradoxically more conservative—more restrained, more imperial—than the flamboyant fictional selves now commanding the show.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band brings a series of songs that would become timeless classics, inaugurating the era of psychedelic rock, but one composition—with a more old-school atmosphere, something Paul McCartney never stopped appreciating—may serve as one of the most complete metaphors for the rupture between old and new Britain. It's "She's Leaving Home," a song that explores this break from a more intimate angle—the family unit. The image of a girl "clutching her handkerchief" as she slips out of her parents'

home is echoed poignantly by the lyrics: "She breaks down and cries to her husband, 'Daddy, our baby's gone.'" Her silent insurgence against domestic ties reflects the broader societal move from duty and deference to individual freedom and self-expression. As in Eleanor Rigby, McCartney could relate to the old character's sentiment—the weeping harp and melancholy strings are there for it—but he knows that his place is with the young lady going off on an adventure. In the context of a post-imperial society, the song becomes emblematic of a youth culture departing from imperial nostalgia and embracing a future defined by choice, mobility, and disobedience.

If "She's Leaving Home" represents the decision to change, "A Day in the Life" throws us into the experience of living in that change. This closing track of *Sgt. Pepper*—for many, the Beatles' greatest composition and the last true Lennon–McCartney collaboration—is a fragmented reflection on life, death, numbness, and the quiet unfolding of events. Lennon's verses—"I read the news today, oh boy / About a lucky man who made the grade"—are a collage of headlines and existential questions, while McCartney's upbeat bridge—"Woke up, got out of bed / Dragged a comb across my head"—evokes the banality of routine. The contrast between "The English Army had just won the war" and the reference to "Four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire" is emblematic of a country learning to live with the ordinary unraveling of its former grandeur. The orchestral crescendos sound like a civilization imploding, and the final piano chord, sustained for over forty seconds, suggests a sense of unnerving irresolution, something that could also be said of the decade itself. As Ian MacDonald observes, the Beatles were not simply musicians but cultural disruptors: "The Beatles' way of doing things changed the way things were done and, in so doing, changed the way we expect things to be done. That the future is partly a consequence of the existence of The Beatles is a measure of their importance" (MacDonald, xi).

In the second half of the 1960s, Britain found itself riddled with holes. Some were remnants of the past—created by Luftwaffe bombings during the Second World War—still visible in certain places as somber reminders for future generations. Others were yet to come, carved by the bombs of The Troubles, which would erupt just one year after the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. There were also more ordinary holes: those born of economic crisis and the crumbling of the welfare state, such as the infamous four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire, that captured Lennon's imagination. And then there were figurative holes—wounds left in the hearts of those who felt that something essential was slipping away. Still, it is tempting to imagine that through these many holes, the luminous music of the Beatles emerged, filling the air with color and melody in a nation ready, once again, to assert itself—this time not through force, but through the irresistible power of sound.

Part III: "A True British National Dish": Zadie Smith's White Teeth and the Spicing Up of the English Novel

The cultural revolution that the Beatles helped orchestrate in the 1960s would have profound and lasting effects on British society. The seeds of change they documented—the breakdown of traditional hierarchies, the embrace of cultural hybridity, the transformation from imperial power to cultural influence—would continue to evolve over the subsequent decades. By the turn of the millennium, the multicultural Britain that had begun with the Windrush generation and been soundtracked by the British Invasion had become a complex, contested reality. It was at this moment that Zadie Smith, herself a

product of this transformed Britain, would offer a panoramic vision of what the nation had become—and what tensions still lay beneath its multicultural surface.

"Be universal, sing your village," said Tolstoy—or so the quote goes. In *White Teeth* (2000), Zadie Smith does exactly that, but with a distinctly multicultural British twist. Born and raised in London, Smith does not sing one village, but many villages contained within one sprawling global city. Her debut novel reimagines the English novel as a hybrid form, where comic polyphony replaces melancholic introspection, and the British Empire's ghosts crash into the vibrant chaos of modern life. Just as Robin Cook, in his famous 2001 speech, proclaimed chicken tikka masala the emblem of a transformed national identity—"a true British national dish," born from adaptation and cultural cross-pollination—Smith constructs a literary equivalent: a novel that is layered, spiced, and unmistakably plural. This essay examines how, through the unlikely friendship of Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal—one embodying the fading imperial Britain, the other its multicultural future—Smith traces the transformation of British identity from military empire to cultural soft power across the latter half of the twentieth century. Their relationship, forged in the claustrophobic confines of a WWII tank and sustained through decades of social upheaval, becomes Smith's lens for examining how post-imperial Britain found new meaning through its former colonial subjects.

White Teeth immediately establishes the stakes of Britain's post-imperial condition. Archie Jones, middle-aged and defeated, sits in his car filled with exhaust fumes on New Year's Day 1975, attempting suicide after the collapse of his marriage to Ophelia, an Italian woman who had dominated their relationship entirely. This scene of attempted self-annihilation reads as more than personal crisis—it is Smith's diagnosis of post-imperial British malaise. The empire that once ruled the waves now cannot even rule its own households, as Archie's emasculation by continental Ophelia suggests. That his savior is Mo Hussein-Ishmael, a halal butcher, establishes the novel's central irony: the very people once colonized will become the salvation of their former colonizers. His later rescue by Clara Bowden, daughter of Jamaican Windrush immigrants, signals Smith's vision of multicultural renewal. Through Clara, Archie discovers what post-imperial Britain might become: not a faded power mourning lost glory, but a nation renewed through cultural mixing.

But to fully grasp the country's transformation, we must begin with one of the novel's foundational scenes: five men trapped in a British tank in Bulgaria in 1945, the dying days of Empire's last great military adventure. This tank—containing the English Archie, the Bengali Muslim Samad, Roy Mackintosh, Will Johnson, and the radio operator Thomas Dickinson-Smith—functions as Smith's brilliant microcosm of imperial Britain itself. Confined in this metal coffin, boundaries of race and class that structured imperial society begin to dissolve under pressure. It is here that Archie and Samad's friendship forms, what Smith calls "the kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday, that he can make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and color, a friendship that takes as its basis physical proximity and survives because the Englishman assumes the physical proximity will not continue." (Smith 82). The tank episode crystallizes the central dynamic between them. It was Archie, ever the Englishman, who suggested they surrender. It was Samad, ever the soldier, who refused. This reversal—the colonized subject more committed to imperial military glory than the colonizer—establishes a pattern that will persist throughout their relationship. When they finally escape and must decide the fate of the Nazi doctor they've captured, it is Samad who demands heroic action while Archie fumbles with his coin, preferring chance to choice—a perfect metaphor for Britain's post-war drift.

The novel's leap to 1970s London reveals how this wartime dynamic has evolved. Britain, having lost its empire, struggles to redefine itself while Commonwealth immigration transforms its cities. As Smith declares: "This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment" (Smith 271). This experiment plays out in the streets of North London, where Archie and Samad continue their unlikely friendship. Archie, now working at MorganHero folding paper—a delicious metaphor for imperial decline, from ruling continents to folding sheets—represents white Britain's bewilderment at its diminished status. As Susan Kingsley Kent observes about this period, the loss of empire produced a crisis of English manhood that coincided with profound social upheaval, as the feminist movement sought to "create entirely different roles, expectations, identities and material realities for women than those currently operative" (Kent 342). This dual crisis—imperial and gendered—is embodied perfectly in Archie's passive drift through life, his inability to assert himself either at home or in the wider world marking the collapse of traditional British masculine authority.

Samad's experience offers a darker counterpoint to Archie's unconscious adaptation. His affair with Poppy Burt-Jones, the music teacher who represents quintessential Englishness, reveals the psychological violence of assimilation. The affair fills him with self-loathing: to Samad, tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. Yet he cannot resist betraying them, knowing that "His God was not in the business of giving people breaks" (Smith 117). This internal conflict—being simultaneously too English and never English enough—mirrors what Hanif Kureishi explored in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where the protagonist confronts his own divided identity: "But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now—the Indians—that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them" (Kureishi 212). Both Samad and Kureishi's protagonist articulate the impossible position of the post-colonial immigrant's dilemma.

This dilemma illuminates the broader dynamics of post-colonial power. Where empire once exercised control through military force, post-imperial Britain seduces through cultural soft power—pop music, sexual liberation, fashion, and increasingly, food. Cook's chicken tikka masala speech, delivered a year after the novel's publication, would celebrate this culinary hybridity as "a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences" (Cook 2001), yet Smith's novel had already exposed the gap between celebrating fusion food and accepting cultural fusion in human terms. Elizabeth Buettner's research reveals how this selective embrace operates: "Once marginalized within British culture, curry became a primary vehicle for denying, masking, and articulating racism, demonstrating the mutually constitutive nature of intolerance and multicultural celebration" (Buettner 901). The British will happily consume curry but resist the curry-makers as neighbors—a contradiction Smith exposes throughout the novel.

Within this context, O'Connell's pub, where Archie and Samad conduct their decades-long dialogue about identity and belonging, functions as another crucial metaphor. This Irish establishment—itself a space marked by colonial history—becomes neutral ground where the two men maintain their friendship despite growing cultural tensions. Their conversations unfold against what Kennetta Hammond Perry identifies as the mystique of British anti-racism: "a concept used to describe the collective myths engendered historically that have over time sustained and reinforced anti-racist perceptions of British

liberalism, tolerance and ostensive benevolence toward racialized colonial subjects" (Hammond Perry 4).

The relationship between Archie and Samad also develops through their children. The generational divide between fathers and children maps the transition from empire to multiculturalism. Samad's desperate attempt to preserve one son from corruption by sending Magid to Bangladesh backfires spectacularly—the boy returns more anglicized than ever. Meanwhile, Millat, kept in London, joins KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), a fundamentalist group whose acronym reveals Smith's satirical intent. As Stuart Hall argues, "Cultural identity… is a matter of 'becoming' as well of 'being'. It belongs to the future as well as to the past" (Hall 394). Both sons embody this impossibility—Magid through hyper-assimilation, Millat through reactive fundamentalism. Smith writes: "Because this is the other thing about immigrants ('fugees, émigrés, travelers): they cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow" (Smith 385).

Smith's inclusion of the Chalfen family adds another dimension to her post-imperial analysis. Marcus and Joyce, liberal intellectuals who believe good intentions can overcome historical wounds, embody what Rushdie called "the disease of optimism" (Rushdie 416). Joyce's gardening metaphors reveal unconscious imperialism—she sees the Iqbal boys as exotic plants to cultivate according to English methods. Smith's free indirect discourse slips between consciousnesses without warning, creating a narrative texture that mirrors multicultural experience. A single paragraph might shift from Archie's muddled perspective to Samad's anxious interiority to ironic commentary. This technique culminates at the FutureMouse unveiling, where Marcus's genetically engineered mouse, its future predetermined, becomes Smith's ultimate metaphor for the fantasy of control underlying both imperial and multicultural ideologies. The erupting chaos reveals the impossibility of managing cultural difference through scientific rationalism. Yet Smith refuses tragic resolution: Archie survives, saved by his war medal—empire's legacy literally protecting him.

The novel's polyphonic form challenges the tradition of the English novel. Where Victorian novels like Dickens's *Bleak House* used multiple plots to create a panoramic view of society from a specific moral perspective, Smith's narrative refuses such unity. Her technique recalls Eliot's *The Waste Land*—"These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (Eliot 19)—but where Eliot's fragments express modernist despair at cultural collapse, Smith's express postcolonial vitality. Her prose style—exuberant, digressive, simultaneously comic and profound—creates what might be called a linguistic multiculturalism, or maybe a literary chicken tikka masala. Characters speak in overlapping vernaculars: Samad's baroque English inflected with Bengali rhythms, Clara's Jamaican patois breaking through her attempts at "proper" speech, the Chalfen children's academic jargon, Millat's street slang mixed with Hollywood gangster vernacular. This is not the unified narrative voice of Victorian realism but something much closer to modern and globalized Britain. Her metaphors, too, perform cultural work. The novel's central metaphor of teeth—white teeth, brown teeth, crooked teeth, false teeth—functions on multiple levels: as markers of class and health, as symbols of consumption and desire, as reminders of the body's stubborn materiality in the face of ideological abstractions. Smith's genius lies in making these metaphors work both locally, in specific scenes, and globally, as organizing principles for the novel's meditation on identity.

Smith's achievement becomes clearer when contrasted with her contemporaries. While Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* presents imperial decline through the repressed

consciousness of a single butler—"I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?" (Ishiguro 243)—Smith explodes this narrow focus into a cacophony of voices. While Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* offers ironic literary games about the impossibility of knowing the past, Smith insists on history's urgent presence in daily life. Her novel refuses both Ishiguro's melancholy and Barnes's detachment, embracing instead the raw anxieties of displacement: "it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, disappearance" (Smith 272). The contrast with Salman Rushdie proves equally illuminating. Where Rushdie employs polyphony as a magical realist device to transcend reality, Smith uses multiple voices to reveal that concrete reality itself—the corner shop, the school gate, the curry house—contains all the magic and hallucination that imagination could conjure.

The novel's treatment of post-war British transformation through Archie and Samad's relationship reveals how personal intimacies become the ground on which historical changes play out. Their friendship, born in imperial warfare but sustained through post-imperial confusion, embodies both the possibilities and limitations of multicultural Britain. The novel suggests that Britain's evolution from military empire to cultural soft power remains neither smooth nor complete. Old imperial reflexes persist—in Joyce Chalfen's benevolent racism, in bureaucratic systems that still define belonging, in the expectation that immigrants will gratefully abandon their cultures for British "civilization."

Reading *White Teeth* in the wake of Brexit, one cannot help but question whether Smith's ultimately hopeful vision of multicultural Britain was perhaps too optimistic, even as she presciently diagnosed the tensions that would eventually tear the nation apart. While the novel's comic resolution suggests faith in hybridity's triumph, it may underestimate the durability of the very nostalgic delusions it exposes. The novel anticipates what Robert Saunders identifies as two key functions of empire in Brexit ideology: "First, it established a continuity between past and present that was uninterrupted by the loss of Britain's colonies... Second... it cast the empire as an expression of British power, rather than its source" (Saunders 21). Smith's characters embody these delusions—from Samad's fantasy of pure cultural transmission to the Chalfens' belief in British superiority as natural rather than historically constructed. The novel shows how the myth of inherent British greatness, divorced from the material realities of empire, creates cognitive dissonance that can only be resolved through scapegoating the very immigrants who represent empire's living legacy. Archie's coin-flipping passivity, Samad's impossible nostalgia, the Chalfens' liberal condescension—all prefigure the contradictions that would explode in 2016 when Britain voted to reclaim an imperial sovereignty it had never truly lost because it had never truly existed in the imagined form.

The novel ends with Irie pregnant, the father either Magid or Millat, this child representing Britain's multicultural future: neither purely one thing nor another, but something entirely new. The polyphony of characters coexisting in the chaotic metropolis may have descended into cacophony, yet we finish reading with the sense that, despite all obstacles, British society might still achieve its ambition of becoming a symphony.

In *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith masterfully captures a chorus of voices drawn from diverse backgrounds, accents, beliefs, and aspirations. Her brilliance as a writer lies not only in her ability to render this collective with nuance and vitality, but above all in her profound recognition that no word is more beautiful than the very act of having a voice.

Conclusion: The Unfinished Symphony

The trajectory from Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* through the Beatles' revolutionary albums to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* reveals both the achievements and limitations of Britain's transformation from military empire to cultural soft power. These works document genuine changes—the emergence of multicultural urban spaces, the democratization of culture, the creation of new hybrid identities—while revealing how imperial structures and mentalities persist in transformed guises.

What emerges from reading these works together is a sense of transformation as an unfinished and perhaps unfinishable process. Each generation must renegotiate the terms of belonging, must find new ways to articulate identity, must struggle with inheritances they didn't choose but can't escape. The very concept of "British culture" remains contested terrain, constantly being redefined through struggle and creativity.

The arts—literature and music particularly—emerge from this analysis not as mere reflections of social change but as active participants in creating new possibilities for identity and belonging. Selvon's linguistic innovations made space for subsequent writers to challenge the hierarchies of British literature. The Beatles' global success demonstrated that British culture could reinvent itself for a post-imperial age. Smith's hybrid aesthetic suggested ways of being British that didn't require choosing between multiple identities.

Yet these artistic achievements couldn't resolve the fundamental contradictions of post-imperial society. The celebration of multicultural art coexisted with persistent racial exclusion. The global success of British popular culture couldn't compensate for economic decline and social fragmentation. The proclamation of chicken tikka masala as a national dish couldn't mask the deeper anxieties about national identity that would eventually explode in Brexit.

The image that haunts all three works is that of holes—the gaps in Galahad's understanding of why his skin color matters, the four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire, the cavity at the center of Archie Jones's existence that he tries to fill with exhaust fumes. These holes represent loss—of empire, of certainty, of stable identity. But they also represent possibility—spaces through which new forms of culture, identity, and belonging might emerge.

As Britain continues to struggle with its post-imperial identity in the wake of Brexit and renewed debates about immigration, these works remain urgently relevant. They remind us that the transformation from empire to soft power was never simply about exchanging military force for cultural influence. It was about fundamental questions of identity, belonging, and justice that remain unresolved. The lonely Londoners are still lonely, though their loneliness takes new forms. The day in the life continues to fragment and bewilder. The white teeth still bite, even as they smile.

In tracing this arc from Selvon's arrival narratives through the Beatles' psychedelic transformations to Smith's millennial complexities, we see not a simple progression but a deepening engagement with what it means to live in and through historical change. These artists teach us that transformation is not a problem to be solved but a condition to be lived, not a destination to be reached but a journey to be continued. Their works stand as testaments to the power of art to capture not just the facts of historical change but its human meaning—the fear and hope, loss and discovery, alienation and connection that mark any genuine transformation.

The British Empire may have ended, but the reverberations of its collapse continue to shape contemporary reality. The soft power that replaced military force has proven both powerful and fragile, capable of conquering hearts and minds but unable to resolve fundamental contradictions. The multicultural society that emerged from imperial collapse contains remarkable creative potential alongside persistent structural inequalities. These three cultural moments—Selvon's groundbreaking novel, the Beatles' revolutionary albums, and Smith's millennial synthesis—capture this complexity in all its richness and contradiction, offering not answers but better questions about what Britain was, what it has become, and what it might yet be.

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Beyond the Whiskers: Cat Metaphors in Select Igbo Literary Texts

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Abstract

Literature, through metaphor, mirrors the thought systems of a people. One such metaphor, the animal metaphor, is significant in framing human relationships with the environment. This paper examines cat metaphors in three Igbo literary texts. Using Jonathan Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis, this qualitative study identifies instances of cat metaphors; explores and interprets their mappings onto human behaviours using the characters and contexts in the study texts. The findings reveal four cases of cat metaphors. It notes that the cat is primarily used alongside the rat to illustrate power dynamics. The dominant is portrayed as the cat, while the subordinate is depicted as the rat. The cat's stealthiness and relationship with the rat are domains for mapping human behaviours. Although the cat metaphor is not extensively used in the studied texts, its usage reflects the Igbo people's perception of the cat as a domestic animal in their geographical enclave. This study contributes to understanding Igbo literature and culture, highlighting the significance of metaphor in shaping societal values and power dynamics.

Keywords: *Cat, Metaphor, Igbo, Nigeria, Power*

Introduction

The universality of metaphor in languages of the world can never be underestimated. Human experiences, perception, and understanding are mirrored through the use of metaphor (Muhammad & Rashid, 2014). It enables humans to comprehend one kind of entity in terms of another. Humans use metaphors to communicate their thoughts as the human mind is, in itself, metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002). They use metaphors to explore their relationship with nature. In the view of Kövecses (2010), metaphor is the understanding of one conceptual domain [target domain] in terms of another domain [source domain]. It is a "linguistic representation that results from the shift in the use of a word or phrase from the context or domain in which it is expected to occur to another context or domain where it is not expected to occur, thereby causing semantic tension" (Charteris-Black, 2004, p.15). Metaphors are relative as their awareness depends partly on the users of the language, especially as it relates to their experience of the language, and metaphorical meanings can vary in different contexts (Susilowati, Wijana & Cholsy, 2023).

A source domain that provides rich metaphorical expressions is that of the animal/fauna (Muhammad & Rashid, 2014; Sommer & Sommer, 2011; Kellert, 1997; Shepard, 1996; Lawrence, 1993). This can be alluded to the relationship shared by humans and animals.

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In the words of Lawrence (1993, p. 301), "No other realm affords such vivid expression of symbolic concepts; symbolising through the use of animals is preeminent, widespread, and enduring." Aside from the fact that humans are regarded as higher animals, they rear and keep other animals either for commercial or subsistence purposes. This study centres on a common domesticated animal, the cat, to metaphorically analyse its use in Igbo literature. The domestic cat (Felis Catus or Felis Silvestris Catus) is a small, hairy, carnivorous mammal (Kingdom: Animalia; Phylum: Chordata; Class: Mammalia; Order: Carnivora; Family: Felidae; Genus: Felis; Species: Felis Catus) (Wozencraft, 2005, pp. 534–535).

The cat is a significant figure in the Igbo environment, making an early appearance in the opening chapter of Chinua Achebe's (1958) classic *Things Fall Apart*. In the novel, Okonkwo is praised for defeating Amalinze the cat at the age of eighteen. Achebe (1958) explains that Amalinze earned the nickname "the cat" because his back would never touch the earth. The Igbo people predominantly reside in the southeastern states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo in Nigeria, with communities also found in Delta and Rivers states in the South-South region (Onuora, Alu, Echem *et al.*, 2020). They speak the Igbo language, which belongs to the Kwa group of languages spoken in West and Central Africa (Metuonu, 2014). Among the Igbo, the cats are domesticated for various reasons. They provide companionship to homeowners and are effective hunters used to control rodent infestations in homes and warehouses. As a little boy who spent part of his early life in the village, I remember vividly that some homes in my community had cats. These homes belonged to elderly people who lived alone. They kept the cats as companions. In this state, the cats had better treatments than the dogs, goats, turkeys, sheep, and fowls. They can sleep in the same room with their owners, a privilege other domestic animals lack. They are given human names and accepted into families as members. Also, many courier outlets and storehouses use cats to keep off rats.

Since people in the Igbo rural areas have domestic cats as pets, the animal is met with negative connotations among religiously conscious folks (Enemchukwu, 2024). The cat, as a spiritual and symbolic entity, is presented as an agent of witchcraft and misfortunes, as they are believed to have supernatural powers. This conceptualisation is a result of Nigerians being notoriously religious as a people, leading to the prevalent cruel treatment and victimisation of cats in Nigeria (Enemchukwu, 2024).

As an animal that exists in their environment, the Igbo use the cat as a metaphor in their folklore and modern-day literature. Igbo literature refers to literature written in the Igbo language (Emenyonu, 2020). The first generation of creative writing in the Igbo language came into being with the publication of Pita Nwana's *Omenụkọ* in 1933 (Felix-Emeribe, 2018). This was followed by D. N. Achara's *Ala Bingo* in 1937 and Leopold Bellgam's *Ije Odumodu Jere* in 1963. Creative writing in Igbo literature came to a halt with the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra war. However, following the war, it experienced a resurgence with the publication of Tony Ubesie's novels (Mbah, 2015; Emenyonu, 2003; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1997), and since then, Igbo creative writing has been propelled by numerous talented writers. This study focuses on three Igbo literary texts: one by Tony Ubesie and two by Chinedum Ofomata. These literary texts are Igbo novels written by acclaimed Igbo literary writers and used in schools and institutions of higher learning.

This study is motivated by the concept of linguistic relativism, which states that each language possesses unique idiosyncrasies and conceptual frameworks that distinguish it from others. Therefore, examining cat metaphors, through the annals of Igbo literary texts, provides an understanding and interpretation of these metaphors within the framework of

Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to identify instances of cat metaphors, explore and interpret their mappings onto human behaviours.

Conceptualising the Cat among the Igbo

The cat is a common domestic animal among the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria. Studies that examine the cat among the Igbo are reviewed in this sub-section. Orji**,** Onwukwe, and Onukawa (2023) in their study of animal-based metaphors in Igbo state that the domesticated cat has dual metaphorical senses in the Igbo culture – derogatory/negative and commendatory/positive. In the derogatory sense, they note that it is associated with a person who is poisonous or deadly, while the positive connotation stems from the cat's predatory nature of preying on rats and other rodents (protector in the course of guarding a house).

In his study of Igbo therianthropy, Kanu (2022) points out that the cat is one of the common animals associated with shape-shifting. He notes that it is used to attack the animal farm of an enemy. Kanu (2022) explains that an enemy could turn into a cat to attack the poultry farm of a prosperous farmer. The examination further notes the relationship between therianthropy and witchcraft as two sides of a coin. In a similar view, Okpalike (2024) observes that it is common knowledge for witches to turn into cats to harm their victims by direct or remote contact. He gives an example of a TV News report where a witch turned into an old woman from a cat after being hit with a stone by a boy.

Ezuruike (2017) states that the Igbo conceptualise the cat as a good wrestler whose back does not touch the earth. This is believed to have stemmed from the cat's agility and resilience. She also notes that it can be used to connote a quiet and dangerous person. The reviews in this sub-section show that the cat has positive and negative connotations among the Igbo. While its positive connotation draws from its ability to prey on rodents, its negative connotation hinges on spiritual attachments that the Igbo people have concerning it. The *meow* sound, the colour of the eyes, and the belief that it can be used for shape-shifting might be reasons for such negative connotations. However, this necessitates this study as it will ascertain whether such conceptualisations align with the cat metaphors in the selected Igbo literary texts.

Studies on Cat Metaphors

Many scholars have examined cat metaphors in different parlances and from various perspectives. Such studies are reviewed in this subsection to chart a path for the present study and to bring to light how the cat is construed in other cultures and languages. Lawrence (2003) believes that the startling polarity in the human-cat relationship stems from the cat's possession of an unusual set of natural and culturally imposed traits. In addition, the persistent image of the cat as half-wild and half-tame as a domestic animal makes it endearing or demonised, depending on the predisposition of the individual or society with which the cat interacts. She notes that the cat is a prime example of the extreme variability in human perceptions of a species, with its image ranging from god to demon.

A study by Liu (2013) investigates cat metaphors in Chinese and English. He explains that cats are Chinese people's favourite pets. The proverb – 'When the cat is away, the mice will play' portrays the cat in a good light, and the mice as the bad ones. This further makes

the cats powerful with leadership abilities. In English, Liu (2013) observes that cats are often referred to as bad women who usually speak ill of others, presenting them as evil. Liu (2013) finds that the cat is a hero in Chinese and evil in English. Therefore, the metaphorical meanings of cats in Chinese are often positive, but negative in English.

Ezuruike (2017) analyses the cultural connotations of animal names in Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo using the theoretical framework of Linguistic Relativity. She observes that while the three Nigerian languages share some similarities, they also have distinct connotations. Regarding the cat, she notes that the Hausa view it as a symbol of laziness, selectiveness, or slipperiness. The Yoruba associate the cat with witchcraft. In contrast, the Igbo conceptualise the cat as a skilled wrestler whose back does not touch the ground; a quiet and dangerous person. Of the three languages, the cat carries a negative connotation in Hausa and Yoruba, with no positive associations. For Igbo, it has both positive and negative connotations.

In their study of cats in Russian and Chinese omens, Ya and Korovina (2020) note that in Russia, the cat is seen as worldly wisdom and cunning, while in China, they are appraised for their ability to expel mice from homes. They note that in Chinese proverbs, the cat can be represented with positive and negative connotations – someone who is smart and a traitor, respectively. Irrespective of the fact that the cat symbolises fertility and longevity among the Chinese, it is also associated with the afterworld; a being that has supernatural abilities to take guises and communicate with spirits. In Russian traditional culture, it is regarded as a source of benefits. They regard three and seven coloured cats as harbingers of well-being, while the black cat is considered a constant companion to a witch.

To ascertain Lakoff and Turner's (1989) proposition of a cat as being fickle and independent, Muhammad and Rashid (2014) examine the similarities and differences in the meanings associated with the cat metaphors in Malay and English proverbs. They note that the proposition is not true. They opine that Malay and English share common metaphorical mappings of cat, although differences occur owing to the social and cultural environments in which the language users live. The study observes that both languages frame cats as authoritative, fierce, and untrustworthy. However, while English frames the cat as useless and lazy, Malay sees them as insignificant and shameless. In a similar analysis addressing the same languages, Adilah and Jamal (2021) investigate feline characteristics using conceptual metaphor theory. Their study finds that the English language has fewer feline proverbs when compared to Malay. Focusing on the cat, the study notes that there are more representations of the cat in Malay than in English. In English proverbs, an adult domesticated cat represents burden, secrecy and inferiority. In Malay, it is viewed as a dreaded and bad person. It can also mean something impossible, being authoritative and a lady who speaks harshly. As it relates to cat gesture/action, in English proverbs, representations such as willingness to take risks and endure annoyance are noted, while in Malay, representations such as hastiness, fright, anxiety, and happiness are realised.

Focusing on Greek and Spanish children's literature, Xouplidis (2020) opines that cats are linguistically, literally, and socially defined literary constructs that can take up human-like features. They serve as narrative motifs for the transmission of social values about non-human animals. The researcher notes that pet cats are positively presented in the literature as privileged, while stray cats are portrayed as underprivileged. Furthermore, cats with seven lives and magical powers are common perceptions of cats in children's literature, dominating in both cultural contexts, stereotypes, and superstitions. Xouplidis (2020, p. 319) states, "literary cats play an important role in the interpretation of nature, exclusively

through human culture, as ultimately, young readers interpret their biological status in ontological terms based on anthropological standards."

Smith (2021) investigates the existence of the feline metaphor – 'Fat Cat' – as a storied signifier of capitalist greed. He examines the visual representations of the metaphor and observes that the predominant images were those of masculine-gendered cats. The 'Fat Cat' metaphor, as a form of business storytelling, uses disembodied textual narratives and parodies the socio-economic elite in the United Kingdom to pass a message that capitalism is not always of the socially responsible type. This seems to be in line with the view of Deignan (2005) that cats in English are negatively used to connote greed and selfishness. Ardianto (2022) conducts a contrastive semantic analysis of animal metaphors in Indonesian and English. He uses the expressions – cat in a sack and pig in a poke – to explain what both animals mean to both languages. English speakers are more likely to be familiar with pigs than cats. He observes that cats are always close to the life activities of Indonesian speakers, implying that they relate more to cats than pigs.

Hwang and Sin (2023) explore the role of cats as symbolic mediators. They note that cats are interpreted diversely, which relates to cultures. In Islamic culture, they are sacred beings; in Buddhist culture, they represent bad omen, while in medieval European Catholic culture, they are the devil's alter ego. Hwang and Sin (2023) highlight the roles cats play as symbolic objects in literary, artistic, geographical, cultural, religious, and psychological spheres. They note that in ancient Egypt, cats were considered objects of worship, symbolising mercy, harvest, love, fertility and healing. They were revered as representatives of God, as evident in the half-human, half-animal goddess with a cat's face – Bastet. They are further constructed as femininity, regeneration, patience and unconsciousness. This shows the cat to be a polysemantic symbol in different cultures and languages, as people can give it various interpretations from various perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

The current study adopts the theoretical tenet of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). The theory addresses metaphor from four perspectives – linguistics, semantics, cognitive, and pragmatics. This is reflected in Charteris-Black's (2004) integration of Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter, CDA), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (hereafter, CMT), and corpus linguistics. CMA is an approach to metaphor analysis that "aims to reveal the covert intentions of language users" (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 34). This implies that it examines metaphorical expressions and descriptions to identify ideologies underlying language (Charteris-Black, 2005). It is also concerned with the analysis of the way metaphors are used to construct meanings in discourses (Charteris-Black, 2019). Charteris-Black (2004) divides his domains into abstract and basic. The basic domain represents human experiences that act as the source output for a more abstract target domain. This means that basic domains are used "to reflect in language how we experience more abstract domains" (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 15).

The two main pillars of CMA are CDA and CMT. CDA employs linguistic expressions to discuss social and historical contexts to reveal hidden ideologies that examine the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Li, 2016). CDA has many models and proponents such as Norman Fairclough (1989), Teun van Dijk (1988, 1996), and Ruth Wodak (1996, 2001). CMT presents metaphor as a cross-domain mapping that is pervasive in human thought. As a theory, it moves metaphor away from the traditional view of an ornamental tool of language use to the terrain of cognition (Li, 2016). CDA and CMT

complement each other in CMA. CMT offers a stronger cognitive dimension to CDA while CDA contributes to CMT through its socio-discursive and linguistic approach (Imperiale & Phipps, 2022).

Charteris-Black (2004, p. 34) lists three stages for the analysis of metaphor. These stages are:

1. Metaphor identification
2. Metaphor interpretation
3. Metaphor explanation

Metaphor identification deals with the tension that may exist between a literal source domain and a metaphoric target domain. Metaphor interpretation is concerned with examining social relations that are constructed in the metaphorical mappings. Metaphor explanation refers to the way a metaphor relates to the situation/context in which it occurs. In CMA, metaphors are not solely interpreted as conceptualisations of the source domain to the target domain. Though the use of metaphors cannot be separated from the intentions of their manufacturers (Susilowati, Wijana & Cholsy, 2023). CMA is therefore suitable for this study as it not only identifies metaphors but also reveals more deeply the intent of such usage.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design and operates within an interpretivist paradigm, grounded in the understanding that reality is socially constructed (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). The research employs the three stages of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) to analyse the selected literary texts. In the identification stage, the texts were carefully read to pinpoint instances of cat metaphors, focusing on semantic tension – the identification of metaphors in unexpected contexts or domains. For the interpretation stage, the study explores the relationship between the cat metaphors and the cognitive and pragmatic factors that influence their use, emphasising the sociocultural framings that shape these metaphors. In the explanation stage, the study highlights the social roles that cat metaphors play in the texts, revealing how they function within the narrative to represent power dynamics and gender relations. The selected texts are –

i. Tony Uchenna Ubesie – *Isi Akwụ Dara n'Ala* (1973)
ii. Chinedum Ofomata – *Anụ Gbaa Ajọ Ọsọ* (2001)
iii. Chinedum Ofomata – *Ihe Ọjọọ Gbaa Afọ* (2005)

Synopses of the Study Texts

Isi Akwụ Dara n'Ala (hereafter, *IADA*) is a novel set before, during, and after the Nigeria-Biafra War (July 6, 1967 – January 15, 1970). It follows Ada, a young woman desperate for marriage, who initially falls for Obiọra, a married man, but ends the affair upon discovering the truth. She later marries Chike, and they have two children, Ọbịanuju and Chukwuma. Their peaceful life is disrupted when war breaks out, forcing them to flee Enugu for Awka and later Agụata, where they endure severe hardship. To support the family, Chike sets up a small business for Ada, as women have more economic freedom during the war. However, success changes Ada. She engages in affairs with army officers, neglects her family, and even orchestrates Chike's conscription into the Biafran army. Chike is later saved by a captain linked to his brother, Okechukwu. After the war, Chike rebuilds his life,

while Ada, now with a child from an affair, begs for reconciliation. Chike refuses, as she has desecrated their marriage, as symbolised by the novel's title: *Isi Akwụ Dara n'Ala* — "the palm fruit bunch that has touched the ground."

Anụ Gbaa Ajọ Ọsọ (hereafter, *AGAỌ*) is an Igbo novel that talks about Ikpendụ, a notorious miscreant who brings shame to his family. Though his parents had troubled pasts, they never imagined having a son who would surpass them in crime. In contrast, his elder brother, Ọzọemena, is his complete opposite. Feared by the villagers, Ikpendụ terrorises the community and preys on women at will. Hoping to reform him, Ọzọemena sends him to Sapele as an apprentice, but Ikpendụ remains incorrigible, squandering his brother's wealth and nearly bankrupting him. Relocating to Onitsha, Ikpendụ establishes a notorious robbery gang. His luck eventually runs out, and he is killed during a heist. His surviving gang members secretly bury him in a distant forest, but his restless spirit returns to torment them, his relatives, and the entire village. A powerful ritual is later performed to end his hauntings once and for all.

Ihe Ọjọọ Gbaa Afọ (hereafter, *IỌGA*) follows Ikenna, a young bachelor who dates two women, namely Ego and Nkemdịrịm, at once. When they discover his deception, he chooses Nkemdịrịm, believing her to be the most beautiful. However, their marriage brings chaos and misery to his life and family. Nkemdịrịm isolates Ikenna, cutting him off from friends, some of whom had encouraged the marriage and showing hostility toward his relatives whenever they visit. Neither Ikenna's warnings nor physical reprimands deter her from her cruel behaviour, leaving him full of regret. Her downfall comes at Ikenna's father's burial, where the *Ụmụọkpụ* (a group of village women) punished her for her excesses. Without warning, she flees the village and abandons the marriage. At the end, Ikenna finds happiness with Ogenna, his well-trained and virtuous housemaid.

Instances of Cat Metaphors in the Study Texts

Four instances of cat metaphors are identified in the study texts. Tony Ubesie and Chinedum Ọfọmata use the cat *nwamba* in these instances to depict their characters and characterisations. The table below presents the metaphoric expressions identified in the texts, their glosses, and the target characters on which the conceptualisations of a cat are mapped.

Instances of Cat Metaphors in the Study Texts

s/n	Metaphoric Expression	Gloss	Target Character	Text & Page
1.	Otu a ka ọ dị na be Chike. Agụ ekoola uzu ebe ahụ, ndị ọchị agha na-abịa achụ nwunye ya zewe ebe ahụ ezewe, maka na oke na-achọghị ọgụ hụ ọnụ nkakwụ bi n'ime ala, o zewe ya ezewe. Ma n'ime ọnụ nke a, ihe bi ya bụ ***nwamba***.	That is how it is in Chike's house. The leopard resides there, and the army commanders who came to flirt with his wife now avoid the place because whenever the rat that does not seek a fight sees the hole of a shrew, it fears it. But in this hole, what lives there is a cat.	Okechukwu	*IADA:* 172
2.	… wee malite gosibe 395mpha anụ ọbụla gbara ọsọ ka oke, ***nwamba*** arịa ya elu.	… and began to show her that any animal that runs like a rat, the cat will climb over it.	Ikenna	*IỌGA:* 211

3.	Ha nọchaa nzukọ I ha ga-esi kpaa Ikpendụ eze, ọ dị ka ụdị nzukọ ahụ ụmụ oke nọrọ wee tụpụta aro I ha ga-esi na-ama mgbe ***nwamba*** na-abịa ka ha were gbaa ọsọ ndụ ha.	After having a meeting on how to deal with Ikpendụ, it would be like the meeting held by the rats, planning how to detect when the cat is coming so they can run for their lives.	Ikpendụ	*AGAỌ:* 43
4.	Ha abụọ na-arụ I ụdị ọrụ maka nkịta na ***nwamba***, ọ dịghị nke hụrụ azụ hapụ.	The two of them do the same work because the dog and cat neither see the fish nor leave it.	Adaobi	*AGAỌ:* 53

In the selected novels of Tony Ubesie and Chinedum Ofomata, four characters are depicted using cat metaphors, each embodying distinct traits associated with the animal, as evident in Table 1. Among them, three are male, while one is female. The following section examines how these characters are conceptualised as cats within the literary texts, highlighting the nuances of their roles and interactions.

Conceptualising the Cat in the Study Texts

The study texts present three distinct conceptualisations of the cat, each reflecting different aspects of its symbolic meaning, which are explored in the following section.

The Cat as Dominant

In *Isi Akwụ Dara N'ala* (*IADA*) by Tony Ubesie and *Ihe Ọjọọ Gbaa Afọ* (*IỌGA*) by Chinedum Ofomata, the cat is portrayed as a symbol of dominance, representing superiority and control over others (entries 1 and 2 in Table 1). Both authors use the cat-rat relationship to illustrate power dynamics, with the cat symbolising dominance and the rat representing subordination. In the natural world, the cat exercises control over the rat, and this relationship is mirrored in the texts to depict authority and hierarchy.

Ubesie (1973) employs this metaphor to describe the power struggle in Chike's household (entry 1 in the Table). During the war in *IADA*, Ada, Chike's wife, engages in amorous relationships with several army officers, who visit her home freely, even in the presence of her husband (*IADA*, p. 163). Chike, afraid to enlist in the Biafran army, is unable to challenge Ada's actions. She exploits this fear, using the threat of conscription to dominate him, warning that her army lovers could forcefully enlist him if he dares to question her behaviour (*IADA*, p. 150). The wartime context grants women like Ada a unique advantage, as they are not subject to forced conscription like their male counterparts. Consequently, Ada's army boyfriends feel emboldened to visit her home without restraint, despite her marital status.

The power dynamics shift with the return of Chike's younger brother, Okechukwu, who has become a captain in the army. Ubesie (1973) extends the cat-rat metaphor to illustrate the transformation in Chike's household. When Okechukwu visited Chike and Ada, he encountered two of Ada's army boyfriends. Initially, they assume he is an ordinary civilian they can intimidate, but upon realising his high military rank, they abandon their car and flee (*IADA*, p. 170). In this moment, Okechukwu assumes the role of the cat, instilling fear in Ada's lovers and asserting his dominance.

Ubesie (1973) further reinforces this hierarchy by introducing the shrew as an intermediary figure in the power scale. He explains that rats naturally fear the shrew, yet in this scenario, Ada's boyfriends do not merely face a shrew (a lesser power); instead, they encounter a cat

(a higher power), Okechukwu (*IADA*, p. 172). Okechukwu's authority stems from his status as a captain, granting him leverage that Chike, his disempowered brother, lacks. Had Okechukwu not held a high military rank, he too would have been powerless, just as Chike was rendered vulnerable by the war. Through this analogy, Ubesie underscores how social and military status determine dominance, shaping interpersonal power struggles during wartime.

Likewise, Ofomata (2005) conceptualises Ikenna as a cat in *IỌGA*, portraying him as a figure of authority and discipline within his household (entry 2 in the Table). In the traditional Igbo society, the man is the head of the household. He wields power and authority over his household. The Igbo marriage system upholds the authority of the man as he is expected to pay the bride price and fulfil all marital obligations; practices that often present the woman as a commodity within the marriage (Oboko & Ifeanyichukwu, 2021). Within this framework, Ikenna asserts control over his wife, Nkemdịrịm, particularly when she disobeys or insults him (*IỌGA*, p. 201). Ikenna initially married Nkemdịrịm for her beauty, unaware of her ill-mannered behaviour (*IỌGA*, p. 110). Her disrespectful attitude creates tension within the family to the extent that her husband's visiting relatives leave abruptly because of her conduct (*IỌGA*, p. 166). As a result of the persistent maltreatment that Ikenna suffers from his wife, he sometimes chooses to overlook her impolite actions and allow her to have her way. However, on some occasions, he responds with physical discipline (*IỌGA*, p. 191). Ikenna, as a cat, exerts authority over Nkemdịrịm. This authority is physically and culturally based. Physically, Ikenna is stronger than Nkemdịrịm. An Igbo proverb, *Ike nwoke dị ya n'ọkpụkpụ aka mana ike nwaanyị dị ya n'ire* ("The strength of a man is in his muscles, while that of a woman is in her tongue") supports this notion that men possess physical dominance. However, this does not negate the fact that there may be some women who are physically stronger than some men. From a cultural viewpoint, Ikenna's authority over Nkemdịrịm is reinforced by his status as her husband, a role that gives him a superior position within the marriage.

The Cat as Predatory

The cat is used in explicating the predator-prey relationship in Ofomata's *Anụ Gbaa Ajọ Ọsọ* (*AGAỌ*) (entry 3 in Table further above). It is used in the text to symbolise Ikpendụ as a calculated predator who stalks his victims and strikes unexpectedly. He terrorises the villagers, thereby making life unbearable for them. As a miscreant, he not only steals from the villagers but also asserts dominance over them. For instance, he steals and kills a goat belonging to a villager named Uwakwe. As if that were not enough, he also cuts Uwakwe's yam tendrils (*AGAỌ*, p. 22). His predatory attitude extends to the point that even some masquerades fear him (*AGAỌ*, p. 46). This is particularly significant because the masquerade cult is highly revered and respected in the Igbo society, as masquerades are believed to embody the spirits of ancestors. Just as the rats instinctively fear cats, the villagers live in constant fear of Ikpendụ. Ofomata (2001) employs the image of the cat to depict how Ikpendụ undermines the village elders' plans to contain him. Each time they conclude a meeting on how to deal with him, he finds a way to thwart their attempts (*AGAỌ*, p. 43). Unable to control his excesses, Ofomata (2001) presents the elders as rats scurrying for safety at the sight of a menacing cat. After their meetings on how to deal with Ikpendụ, fear prevents them from carrying out the resolution because each of them is concerned with their safety (*AGAỌ*, p. 43). Ikpendụ is portrayed as a master criminal, exuding authority over those he dominates.

The Cat as Dangerous

Ofomata (2001) conceptualises Adaobi in *Anụ Gbaa Ajọ Ọsọ* (*AGAỌ*) as a cat (entry 4 in the Table above). Adaobi is Ikpendụ's girlfriend at Bida. She has the same character mould as Ikpendụ, and this is what bonds their relationship. She shares in Ikpendụ's ruthless and predatory nature. Together, they make life unbearable for the people of Bida. In this metaphorical expression, Ofomata (2001) presents Ikpendụ as a dog and Adaobi as a cat, highlighting their shared affinity because both are predators that feast on fish. As a dangerous predator known for its cunning and lethal hunting techniques, Adaobi terrorises the men at Bida. To illustrate how efficient a killer she is, Ofomata (2001) recounts with the statement: *ị kpọọ Ikpendụ abalịdịegwu, mara na ihe ị ga-akpọ Adaobi bụ ehihiedịegwu. Ihe nwagbọghọ a ji ehihie mee ụmụ okorobịa bụ naanị Chukwu ga-akọ ya* (*AGAỌ*, pp. 53–54) (If you call Ikpendụ 'one who makes the night dreaded', then you must call Adaobi 'one who makes the day dreaded'. What this lady does to young men in the daytime can only be explained by God). This statement underscores Adaobi's fearsome reputation, solidifying her as a truly dangerous person.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study reveals that cat metaphors are employed for both male and female characters in Igbo literature, although they are mainly used for the males. It is worth noting that cat metaphors in Igbo literary parlance do not enjoy the same number of usages with fauna such as dog, fowl and rat; hence, the limited number of cat metaphors analysed in this study. The cat, naturally a predator, dominates and terrorises rats, which is a theme seen in the works of Tony Ubesie and Chinedum Ofomata. These seasoned Igbo novelists incorporate this predator-prey relationship into their writings, highlighting the cat's dominance, especially over rats. In *IADA*, Okechukwu is conceptualised as a cat to illustrate how he dominates and overpowers Ada's army boyfriends. Ada's army boyfriends are depicted as rats, reluctant to fight back and instead fleeing for safety, aware that Ada's married status makes it shameful for them to be killed while on an adulterous mission. In *IỌGA*, Ikenna is also depicted as a cat, showing how he overpowers his wife, Nkemdịrịm, whenever she provokes him. This resonates with the Igbo belief that cats are strong and resilient. In *AGAỌ*, Ikpendụ is portrayed as a cat to express how he dominates his village elders, showing his predatory nature. The elders, depicted as rats, cannot execute any of their plans on him due to fear. Ofomata further draws a parallel between Ikpendụ and his accomplice, Adaobi, using metaphors of the dog and the cat, respectively. Adaobi, as a cat, is shown to dominate the men in Bida, emphasising the cat's stealth and thieving nature.

This study underscores that cat metaphors in Igbo literature can have multiple conceptualisations, reinforcing the dual metaphorical senses of the cat as both negative/derogatory (poisonous/deadly) and positive/commendatory (predatory/protector) in Igbo ideology by Orji, Onwukwe, and Onukawa (2023). Okechukwu's action in *IADA* can be regarded as commendatory as he tries to stop his brother's wife from her adulterous lifestyle. For that of Ikenna in *IỌGA*, some might consider it right as he tries to reprimand his unmannered wife while others might consider it as wife battering. However, this study challenges the view that the cat's predatory role is entirely positive, particularly in cases like Ikpendụ in *AGAỌ*, where his predatory actions are harmful to the village elders. Additionally, this study points out that while generally, the Igbo associates the cat with protection against rodents in their everyday discourse, the dominant and predatory aspects of the cat are more present in the literary texts studied.

Furthermore, the cat-rat relationship consistently portrays the cat as dominant and the rat as subordinate, reflecting the power dynamics between genders in Igbo society, where the males are perceived to be dominant and the females, subservient.

In conclusion, the current study has shown that cat metaphors in Igbo literature are powerful tools for illustrating complex relationships, particularly power dynamics between characters. Through the use of cat metaphors, male and female characters in the studied texts are depicted as dominant forces. The cat's dominant, predatory, and dangerous nature is used to portray characters in the texts. This study emphasises that although the predatory nature of the cat can be positive, it can also carry negative connotations. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how animal metaphors, such as that of the cat, can be used to mirror societal structures and reinforce themes of power and control in Igbo literary traditions.

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Italian Colonialism in Asia: the Unknown History of the Italian Concession of Tianjin, China

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Abstract

My short essay focuses on the history of the Italian concession of Tianjin, China, granted to Italy in 1901 and ceded back to China in 1947, and how it contributed to the relationship between Italy and China in the following years. The Italian concession in Tianjin is part of the Italian colonial past although, differently from the other colonies which were totally subjected to the Italian government, Tianjin was an example of "informal imperialism", a sort of rented territory that the foreign powers had the right to treat as a national area and rule according to their own national laws. The foreign citizens living in the concessions were not supposed to respect the Chinese law, rather their own national legislation. The concessions of the nine foreign powers in Tianjin, including the Italian one, had always represented a defeat for China that had to kneel to the military superiority of the West in the context of the Opium and Boxer Wars. This is why what was built by the foreigners was modified over the years, and many buildings and roads were given different names mirroring the various ideologies of the following historical times. Nevertheless, after China's opening to the free market, in the late 1970s, the past foreign presence in China was reinterpreted and transformed into an opportunity to intensify the internationalization of the country, boosting exchanges with the West, economic activities and tourism.

Keywords: *Italy, China, Tianjin, colonialism, concession*

Introduction

The history of Italian colonialism in Asia is still relatively unknown. More was written about the African colonies and the Dodecanese, though the attempt to popularise these black pages of the Italian past is still very limited. In secondary schools, e.g., these topics are rarely dealt with. Recently, China's participation in the neoliberal global economy increased contacts and exchanges between East and West, so more was written and revealed about the Italian concession in Tianjin (Di Meo, 2015, p.165). My article focuses on the Italian presence in Tianjin, from 1901 to 1947, and its legacy in the relationship between China and Italy in the following years. I tried to discover why Italy took part in the "scramble for China" and what kind of colony Italy established there.

In the XIX century, Italy was in China as an ally with other European countries, trying to weaken China, forcing it to accept the commercial exchanges with the West that it refused. The military balance was in favour of Europe and, after the Opium Wars, the Qing dynasty was obliged to open its ports according to British decisions. Britain, other European countries and Japan gained extraterritoriality, i.e., the right to apply their laws in their

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Chinese territories. To defend their representatives in Beijing and defeat the anti-foreign Boxers, a coalition of European and Japanese troops intervened, occupying the capital after a 55-day siege. Italy took part in the conflict and, after the western victory, it obtained its own concession in Tianjin, in 1901. From 1860 to 1947, the city of Tianjin became the site of the nine foreign concessions of Britain, France, the United States, Japan, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Belgium. As a whole, the concessions covered a small area of 15.5 km2 and Italy was given a territory of half km2. Tianjin became a kind of "hyper colony" because of the concentration of so many different foreign powers. It was a very modern town as the Europeans and Japanese transformed its wetland and poor huts into a flourishing economic center. However, the foreign presence represented a humiliation for China and its submission to western imperialism. After Tianjin's return to China, the Chinese tried to conceal their past by changing the foreign names of buildings and roads into names belonging to Chinese History and tradition. Only after China's opening to the free market economy, in the late 1970s, and its interest in globalisation, the foreign presence in Tianjin was reinterpreted as a past no longer to be hidden, it was seen rather as a starting point for more intense contacts with the western world.

My essay tries to follow the history of Tianjin's Italian concession, how it developed during the Italian presence in China and after Italy gave it back. What Italy left in China was memories and traces that the Chinese no longer wanted to forget, on the contrary, it became the beginning of a deeper relationship with the West within the context of the neoliberal globalization.

Historical Context

In the XIX century, China tried to set limits, in its territory, to the presence of some European powers which had expanded since the XVI century. In order to keep up with the western nations, the weakening Qing dynasty had to buy goods and weapons from the Europeans, while Chinese merchants were more and more attracted by the West, a double dependence which undermined the stability of the Chinese empire. The Qing had always controlled their commercial foreign enclaves along its coasts, forcing the foreigners to respect imperial laws, but in the XIX century the balance of power was in favor of Europe. Britain's two Opium Wars with China, in 1839–42 and 1855–60, show how a stronger military power could force a weaker state to accept the commercial exchanges it wanted to refuse (Burbank & Cooper, 2011, p. 294). Opium, tea, coffee, tobacco and sugar were goods that attracted Chinese consumers. The East India Company was a relevant buyer of Chinese tea and seller of the opium produced by Britain, especially in India. In 1830, the Qing Empire outlawed the opium trade in order to defend the Chinese economy and public health. The risk of a consequent economic collapse led Britain to declare war on China, forcing it to open its ports on British terms. The first British-Chinese Opium War ended with a British victory signed in 1842 with the Treaty of Nanjing. The British could now reside in their Chinese territories and carry out their trade under their own laws. Another humiliation for China was the British and French occupation of the Forbidden City, at the end of the second Opium War, and the burning of the imperial palace. By the mid-nineteenth century, several foreign powers had gained extraterritoriality, i.e., the right to apply their laws in their Chinese territories and to be judged by their own courts all over China (Burbank & Cooper, 2011, p. 296). Another challenge for Empress Cixi was the presence of Christian missionaries whose preaching questioned the Chinese tradition. From the 1850s to the 1870s, a wave of revolts broke out and by the end of the century the anti-Christian and anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion exploded. As the Empress ambiguously

supported the Boxers against the foreigners, a coalition of European and Japanese troops intervened to defend their legations in Beijing and, in 1900, to put an end to the 55-day Boxer siege (Ray, 1963) occupying the capital with the Battle of Beijing. As Italy took part in the conflict, it obtained a concession in the town of Tien Tsin (later called Tianjin), southeast of Beijing.

Tianjin

The original name of Tianjin, Tianjin Wei, can be translated as "the guard to the bridge to heaven" referring to its location and its role of protecting Beijing where the Emperor or "Son of Heaven" lived and ruled. It was a very populous city in Northern China with extraordinarily busy commerce and shipping traffic (Marinelli, 2007, p. 130). Between 1860 and 1947 the Chinese port of Tianjin was the site of nine foreign concessions. In 1860, Tianjin became the concession of Britain, France and the United States. Between 1895 and 1902 concessions were given to Japan, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Belgium. Italy kept its concession from 1901 to 1947 when, with the 1947 Treaty of Paris, it was deprived of all its colonies including the Asian concession. As regards Tianjin, this was just a formal act since, in 1943, Italy had already agreed with Japan to give up its Chinese possessions and cede the authority to the Nanjing Government (Marinelli, 2007, p. 147).

Tianjin had always been the port of Beijing, 120 km to the northwest. In the second half of the XIX century, it became the most westernized and modern part of China, a major international trading city with a railway and telecommunication networks, modern educational and legal systems and a mining industry (Marinelli, 2009, pp. 399–400). Altogether, the concessions covered an area of 15.5 km2, the Italian concession being one of the smallest, around half km2, just larger than the Belgian one. There are no precise statistics about Tianjin's total population, but in 1860 the population may have been about 300,000, while in 1920 there were around 837,000 Chinese, 5,914 Europeans and Americans, 4,000 Japanese and 1,200 Russians. Foreign concessions in Tianjin were progressively dismantled in the early XX century: the American concession was ceded to Britain in 1902, Germany and Austria-Hungary left in 1917, Russia in 1920 and Belgium in 1929. At that point, the only four remaining concessions were those of Britain, France, Japan and Italy. The Italian one lasted till 1947 (Marinelli, 2009, p. 400).

Ruth Rogaski defined the city as a 'hypercolony' due to the concentration and juxtaposition of different foreign areas (Marinelli, 2009, p. 402). The American journalist John Hersey, born in Tianjin, the son of missionary parents, gave this description of his town:

> What a weird city I grew up in. For three or four Chinese coppers, I could ride in a rickshaw from my home, in England, to Italy, Germany, Japan, or Belgium. I walked to France for violin lessons; I had to cross the river to get to Russia, and often did, because the Russians had a beautiful wooded park with a lake in it (Hersey, 1982, p. 54).

Tianjin was not just a victim of foreign penetration, it was one of the most modern places in China and could boast of a number of 'firsts' in Chinese history: it had the first Chinese railway, the first modern mail service, the first mint, the first newspaper, the first set of stamps, the so-called dragon stamps. The coexistence of foreign presences shaped the city making it a unique combination of foreign flavors and indigenous cultural identity. This made Tianjin move out of Beijing's shadow, becoming more modern than the capital (Zhang, 2018, p. 72).

All the nine concessions in Tianjin (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 32), except that of the United States, shaped their part of the town with their home country's architectural style so that this area around the banks of the Hai Ho River became a 'European architectural enclave' (Zhang, 2018, p. 74). Each foreign power reproduced its own urban environment and provided modern facilities like drainage, lighting, schools, hospitals, prisons, barracks. They transformed this rural area into a flourishing economic center. After the conflict with the Boxers, the concessions got the right to set up barracks so that Tianjin became the city with the largest number of foreign soldiers in China. This military presence was a symbol of imperialist infiltration into China and of the weakness of the Qing dynasty. After the fall of the Qing empire, in 1911, many former Qing officials moved to Tianjin where they built villas in the concession area.

The Italian Concession of Tianjin

The Italian concession in Tianjin (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 25) was the only representation of Italian colonialism in Asia. When Italy obtained it, it contained a low-level wetland (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 27), a cemetery (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 19) and many huts for Chinese laborers (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 10). In 1917, a terrible flood of the Hai Ho River killed 500,000 people in Tianjin. The only part of the town that was not flooded was the Italian concession where many Chinese and foreigners were able to save their lives. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received numerous expressions of deep gratitude (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 164).

The administration of this Chinese territory was different from the African colonies. The concession was a kind of rented territory, Italy had to pay China 2,800 golden *lire* per year (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 159). The transformation of this poor area into a flourishing district required a large sum of money. In 1912, the Italian Government lent 400,000 *lire* for the public works (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 163). Vincenzo Fileti (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 60), a lieutenant in the Boxer War who was appointed Consul General of the Italian concession from 1909 to 1919, played a fundamental role in providing funds for the reconstruction of the Italian district (Zhang, 2018, p. 75). The financial resources for the Italian area's self-sustaining came above all from the local properties, not from trade or productive enterprises which were few. In time, the Italian concession's role as a commercial enclave weakened and it became just a symbol of Italian pride, especially during Fascism. Nevertheless, this small and almost insignificant territory was transformed, more than the other foreign concessions, into one of Tianjin's most important landmarks of Chinese history and culture (Zhang, 2018, p. 76).

Postcolonial Tianjin

When the Chinese Communist Party went to power, in 1949, it aimed at cancelling the traces of China's colonial past. The concessions represented western imperialism and a humiliation for China. The communists tried to put an end to the privileges enjoyed by the foreign powers, defending the values of equality, mutual respect, territorial integrity and sovereignty. One of the ways to forget the past was that of changing the names of buildings, streets and urban areas. Thus, Rue de France, in the French concession, became Liberation Road while Victoria Road, in the British concession, was named North Liberation Road. Similarly, during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966−1976), the famous Kiessling Restaurant was renamed Workers-Peasants-Soldiers Cafeteria, though,

later on, during the politically more moderate early 1970s, the name was changed back to the original one, thanks to the restaurant's employees' petition to Premier Zhou Enlai, motivated by the fact that the original name attracted more customers. Similarly, the post-war administrators must have thought that it was meaningless to destroy the well-constructed buildings of the foreign powers; it was wiser to use them as offices or houses for Chinese citizens (Zhang, 2018, p. 77).

China has recently become a free market economy integrated into the global world. Post-Mao China has largely refused some revolutionary, anti-imperialist choices and some symbols of Maoist China, so that what remained of the colonial past, like the architecture in the foreign concessions, has been reconsidered and many buildings have been renovated and integrated into the country's local cultural heritage (Zhang, 2018, p. 79). History has been reinterpreted and the representations of the past are changing in the new political and economic climates of post-socialist, neo-liberal China (Denton, 2014, p. 9). As regards Tianjin, the municipal government preserved many foreign-looking constructions due to their exotic aspect that could boost tourism and commercial activities. Local authorities invested, in particular, in the renovation of the well-kept Italian and British areas. The Italian-Style Exotic District, largely located in the former Italian concession, and the Five Great Avenues in the former British concession are now relevant cultural tourist attractions in Tianjin. In the late 80s, the Mayor of Tianjin was interested in transforming the Italian district into a new cultural area but financial difficulties prevented the achievement of this goal. He visited Italy and Europe several times to find support and funds, without relevant results. In 2003, the project was resumed by another Mayor of Tianjin, Dai Xianglong, an influential politician who had strong connections to China's national banks. He was given a huge loan which he invested above all in the restoration of the Italian concession. It was a complex and expensive work because the Italian area had more than 300 historical buildings, many of them were dismantled while around 130 survived. Chinese companies cooperated with Italian ones. The center of the renovated Italian session was Marco Polo Plaza (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 31) and Dante Square (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 75). In the middle of Marco Polo Plaza stood a stone column with the bronze statue of the Goddess of Peace, holding a sword in her hands (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, pp. 244–245). After the restoration, the sword was replaced with an olive branch (Zhang, 2018, p. 83). Though the Italian concession represented a humiliating experience, it acquired a new significance in modern China when modernity, globalization and free trade assumed positive meanings in view of Tianjin's international prestige and tourist success (Zhang, 2018, p. 84). The reconstruction of the Italian section started in 2002, was largely completed in 2005 and then opened to the public. This time too, the original names of streets and buildings were changed, but for a different reason, i.e., to encourage tourism and business activities. The names Marco Polo Road and Dante Avenue were restored while the new titles of the area "Italian-Style Exotic District" or "Italian Style Town" show that China no longer wanted to hide the past Italian presence in Tianjin, on the opposite, the Italian name was preserved to give the area a flavor of authenticity and internationalism linked to the charm that the Italian cultural and artistic heritage often arouses all over the world (Zhang, 2018, p. 84). As tourism has recently gained extraordinary importance in China, Chinese leaders see historical buildings as a precious treasure and their restoration as a way to increase communication and cultural contacts between the two peoples (Zhang, 2018, p. 85). Lou Shuwei, a well-known scholar and expert on the history of Tianjin, highly praised the role of Vincenzo Fileti, Consul General of the Italian concession between 1909 and 1919, in his essay "Fileti and the Opening of the Italian Concession in Tianjin", published in 2001 (Zhang, 2018, p. 85). Similarly, the

authorized publication "A Glance at One Hundred Years and the Return of the Italian Style" praises the former Italian concession and suggests that a visit to it represents an experience of immersion in early XX-century Italy. The Italian district is described as the most charming among the former foreign concessions (Zhang, 2018, p. 86). There seems to be no longer hatred towards the heritage left by the Italians and the other foreigners. People of Tianjin transformed its painful history into a promising perspective making full use of its rich historical resources (Zhang, 2018, p. 87).

Tianjin's Peculiar Imperialism

Tianjin is different from the other Italian colonies. How can Tianjin be properly defined? a concession? a colony? a settlement? a part of an empire? These terms are sometimes ambiguously used. A settlement is a commercial area administered by a foreign private company, like the East Indian Company. A concession, instead, is a territory in a certain nation, ceded to a foreign country with a contract that gives the foreigners the power to rule that area according to their own laws on the basis of extraterritoriality. Tianjin was a concession because it belonged to China but the foreign countries could rule their concessions according to their own laws and the citizens were judged by their own courts, not by the Chinese legislation. The Italian concession was sometimes defined as a colony, a microscopic one, similar to the other Italian colonies (Di Meo, 2015, pp. 168–169), but it was not a proper definition: the colonial territories belong to the colonizing state, while a concession is a territory temporarily ceded to foreigners according to a sort of rent contract.

As Sabina Donati suggests, the Italian concession of Tianjin was an example of "informal imperialism" (Donati, 2016, p. 447). The expression was invented by the British, but concerned other countries, too. If imperialism refers to the expansion of a country's territory in the form of colonies, "informal imperialism" means an empire without colonies, based on free trade treaties imposed upon weakened states. The power of the western nations on Qing China and Ottoman Turkey are examples of informal imperialism. Britain developed this technique of forcing the decisions on a weak country which cannot defend itself because of economic and military inferiority (Donati, 2016, p. 450). An informal empire did not imply complete territorial subjugation and full colonial control. After the Opium War, British trade in China developed as informal imperialism because it was forced on and not welcomed by the Chinese, thanks to Britain's coercive methods and gunboat diplomacy (Donati, 2016, p. 451). Informal imperialism was based on a system of treaties, the so-called "unequal treaties", which regulated the lives, jobs, properties of the foreigners who resided in the treaty ports under the consular jurisdiction of their country of origin, and could be judged according to their national laws in the name of extraterritoriality. The foreign powers had the right to administer these areas with their own taxation and police force. The treaty system was, for the foreign powers, a means to secure economic opportunities and, for China, a way to appease the "western devils" limiting the erosion of China's sovereignty through signed agreements.

Italy was not just a spectator of the evolution of this form of imperialism (Donati, 2016, p. 452). It joined the group of foreign powers in China in 1866, though it boasted of a previous long contact and friendship with China, thanks to great personalities like the Venetian merchant Marco Polo and the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci. At the time of the Boxer uprising, the Italians living in China were few; they worked above all in the commerce and production of silk and as sailors in the transportation of coolies, i.e., people

condemned to forced labor, transported to distant places in inhuman conditions (Di Meo, 2015, pp. 31−32). There were several Italian missionaries too, most of them under the protection of France instead of Italy, because of the difficult relationship between the recently unified Italian State and the Pope (Di Meo, 2015, pp. 37−39).

After the victory of the Eight-Power Alliance on the Boxers and the signature of the Boxer Protocol in 1901, Italy signed the 1902 Sino-Italian agreement with which Rome extended its privileges in the Legation Quarter of Beijing, received a percentage of the Boxer indemnity and an exclusive concession in Tianjin. Thus, Italy did not only take part in imperial colonialism in Africa, but also in the scramble for trade privileges in Asia, through an informal imperial strategy. The reasons behind this choice can be summarized with two connected expressions: great power politics and search for prestige at international level (Donati, 2016, p. 453). The Italian authorities in China tried to emphasize the economic potential of the Tianjin treaty port for Italian traders and entrepreneurs but, in fact, the diplomatic efforts to create commercial networks were not so successful and the presence of the Italian trade in Tianjin remained modest. According to the Italian observer and lawyer Elio A. Perogio, the "made in Italy" was basically a myth in the whole Asia (Donati, 2016, p. 454). Statistics confirm that there was not an increase of trade between Italy and China during the liberal era: China's total imports and exports amounted to 11,334 Hk.T (Haikwan taels) in 1910 and 8,369 Hk.T in 1922 while, in the same period, China's total trade passed from 857,386 Hk.T in 1910 to 1,629,926 Hk.T in 1922. An obstacle to Italian commercial development in China was the absence of a regular Italian shipping line linking major Italian ports to East Asia. To trade with East Asia, Italian companies had to use foreign ship liners at very disadvantageous conditions (Donati, 2016, p. 455).

Organizing the Italian Concession

Few Italians lived in Tianjin: 4 individuals in 1911 and 51 in 1922; the Chinese in the Italian concession were the majority, 13,800 in 1903 and 9,900 in 1918; foreigners of western nationalities were 120 in 1918. Italian governments did not show much interest in the Italian concession. There was not an efficient banking institution that could have supported Italian investments in China. Only in 1920, the Italian government gave the authorization to open a Banca Italo-Cinese in Tianjin, though in the French concession, not in the Italian one (Donati, 2016, p. 456). It promoted the expansion of commercial relations between China and Italy, although Italian companies and capital were very limited (Donati, 2016, p. 457).

Comparing the Italian to the Japanese concessions, we can see that the latter's commercial activities thrived in the first two decades of the XX century. Both concessions seemed very unpromising at the beginning, the Italian one being full of marshy lands and salt deposits. When Tokyo received the territory in 1898, no more than 50 Japanese lived there. By 1921 they were 5,000. The Japanese population expanded together with commerce and industry and the Japanese government actively supported trade in China due to the crucial importance of its large neighbour. Italian governments, on the other hand, were much less active and interested in the Tianjin concession. They seemed to have sent their representatives there, just because they did not want to be excluded from the "Chinese banquet" and in order to keep a place in the international concert of powers in East Asia. Ambassador Salvago Raggi and Vincenzo Fileti thought that this carelessness severely damaged the prestige of Italy in the Far East (Donati, 2016, p. 458).

The limited number of Italian citizens in Tianjin made it difficult to build an independent municipality in the town. The result was that, until 1922, the administration remained in the hands of the Italian Consulate and the Italian Legation in Beijing. Italian consuls had the power to lay taxes and maintain a police force in Tianjin with eight royal *carabinieri* under the authority of a *maresciallo*. There were also thirty-six indigenous guards involved in the control of the public order. In Tianjin, as well as in any colony, collaboration with the natives was essential. An independent municipality did not exist during the liberal era, it was created in September 1922, at the end of the liberal era, and approved in January 1923, during the fascist time. The administration of the concession was transferred to an elective Italian Municipal Council under the presidency of the Italian Consul. The question of a municipality in Tianjin arose in 1913 and concerned above all the problem of the voting system. The future Italian municipality had to be voted by a group of electors who had to be the Italians living in the concession (with or without property) plus the citizens of the other foreign powers (only if property owners). Nothing was said about the indigenous people living in the concession, meaning that they were excluded from the electorate. These decisions define a hierarchy of rights based on nationality and property (Donati, 2016, p. 463). In 1922, more precise rules concerning voting rights were introduced: the Municipal Council had to be composed of 5 *consiglieri,* to be increased to 7 when the number of Italian and other foreign electors would be higher than 100. The councillors had to be Italian, only one of them could be a foreigner of the Eight Powers. The exclusion of Chinese was not total, as it was in 1913; a certain participation was admitted: only Chinese property owners, resident in the concession for at least one year, paying a monthly rent of 30 Mexican dollars, had the right to elect or to be elected in the *Comitato Consultivo Cinese*, a Chinese committee composed of three natives having only a consultative role in the examination of local taxes and budget issues (Donati, 2016, p. 463). The Italian Municipal Council met for the first time in November 1923, in the neo-Renaissance palace in Corso Vittorio Emanuele III (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 47) opposite the Italian consulate. When the fascists went to power, the territory got under the control of a *podestà* (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 165) who replaced the municipal authority. During Fascism, Galeazzo Ciano moved to China first in 1927, remaining there for nearly two years, and then in 1930 as General Consul staying there for three more years. During his presence in China, the collaboration between the two countries reached its climax and he tried to spread the fascist ideology in China (Di Meo, 2015, pp. 132–135).

Italy's power in Tianjin was certainly limited if we compare it to the other Great Powers. However, the presence of the Italian flag in Tianjin, like the flags of the other foreigners, remained an expression of China's weakness, its financial and economic dependence and the aggressiveness of the Great Powers (Donati, 2016, p. 468).

Jews in Tianjin

An interesting topic concerning the administration of Tianjin was what happened to the Jewish population after the advent of Fascism. China was traditionally tolerant to other cultures and to the Jews. The country never produced the religious prejudices and racial discriminations that gave rise to anti-semitism in Europe. The presence of Jews in China probably goes back to the VI century b.c.e (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 62). Jews and Chinese have always had great respect and admiration for each other (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 104). Empress Wu Zetian (625–705) was not the only sovereign who welcomed other cultures and built a multiethnic and multicultural empire (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 55). Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta wrote in their diaries that they had met Jews in China

(Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 66). During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the town of Kaifeng hosted a large community of Jews who were wealthy and never suffered persecution (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 67). There has never been a *ghetto* in China, except during nazi times. One of the negative stereotypes about Jews in Europe, the interest for profitable activities, trade and banking, is seen in China with admiration (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 56–57). Among the possible plans for the founding of a Sionist state, China was one. During Nazi-fascism around 30,000 Jews came from Eastern Europe to China and were protected there, especially in Shanghai (20,000 Jews in 1939), Harbin (12,000 in 1920) and Tijanin (3,500 in 1940). The Chinese Consul in Vienna, He Fengshan, provided the Jews with documents and permits to escape persecution, saving a lot of lives (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 59). When the Japanese invaded Shanghai and Hong Kong, in 1941, they confiscated the properties of the Jews, but the "final solution", required by their nazi allies, was never practiced and the Jews were never confined to the Germans.

In 1860, the Tianjin Jewish community consisted of 10 families including, above all, people arriving from Russia where tsarist anti-semitic persecutions were increasing (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 92). Many Jews in Tianjin lived in the British concession where trade and economic activities flourished. In the Italian concession in Tianjin there were 11 Italian Jews in 1913 and 29 in 1934 (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 94). In Tianjin the Jews hardly ever suffered from anti-semitism, except by a few Germans and White Russians. The Jewish community in Tianjin must have been relevant if, in 1925, fascist Italy sent a Jewish consul, Guido Segre, to the concession (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 104). Jewish migration from Europe increased in 1938 and 1939 when racial laws became stricter. Around 30,000 European Jews found refuge in Shanghai, a smaller group in Tianjin. They were welcomed and protected in China (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 106). The darkest time for Jews in China was when the Japanese invaded Shanghai and Hong Kong, in 1941, they confiscated the properties of the Jews but they did not kill them (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 109). The Japanese were not anti-semitic, they were rather interested in integrating people, like the Jews, who could promote economic development. Japan never followed the European racist laws against Jews, Rom people and disabled. This does not mean that the Japanese were not racist: their racism was rather against Asian populations, considered inferior, that Japan wanted to subjugate into a unified pan-Asian nation. The Nanking massacre and the genetic experiments in Japanese concentration camps prove this attitude (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 148). After 8th September 1943, the Italians in Tianjin and in China became Japan's enemies and all those that did not recognise the fascist Salò Republic were taken to Japan's prison camps.

Under Japan's power, Tianjin was also the shelter of the last Chinese Emperor Pu Yi who was deprived of his power after the birth of the Republic of China, in 1911. When Kuomintang took power, in 1924, Pu Yi was forced to leave the Forbidden Town, moving to his father's Zaifeng residence first, then to the Japanese Legation in Beijing, and finally to Tianjin, where he had apparently good relations with the foreign representatives, though good treatment and special permissions were just reserved to him, not to other Chinese (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 118). He then became the puppet sovereign of the Manzhouguo Empire controlled by the Japanese (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 138).

Italian and Chinese Points of View About the Tianjin Concession

Maurizio Marinelli highlights how positively the official Italian sources describe the conquest of Tianjin, in contrast to the Chinese sources. Italian information reveals a progressive success of the infrastructural projects that transformed the poor Chinese area full of wetland and wretched dwellings into a beautiful district glorifying the strength of the Italian nation. Italian sources tend to obscure the presence of Chinese citizens, considering them subalterns (Marinelli, 2007, p. 124). According to the journalist Gennaro Pistolese, in 1935, the total population in the Italian area was 6,261, which included 5,725 Chinese and 536 foreigners, among which 392 Italians: "Our concession has a demographic consistency superior to the other concessions in Tien-Tsin", he stated, comparing the data of the concessions of Japan (5,000 people), Britain (2,000) and France (1,450).

Many Italian writers in the Thirties, in line with the fascist regime, tried to describe the events in China (and in the African colonies, too) as examples of "benign colonialism", emphasizing the success of the Italian civilising mission (Marinelli, 2007, p. 125). For the Italian government, the acquisition of Tianjin was very significant in terms of national prestige and international acknowledgement, even though it was not an economic success. The sources describing the concession at the arrival of the Italians insist on the negative conditions of the area divided into four main zones: the "stinky" salt deposit; the poor huts were the Chinese workers lived in "misery" and "indigence"; the "vast abandoned and flooded cemetery"; the wetland which could be as deep as 3–4 meters, completely frozen in the winter (Marinelli, 2007, p. 128). Similarly, the other concessions were described in negative terms and derogatory expressions were often used to portrait the local population. This recurrent motif, i.e., the very bad conditions first and the improvements introduced by the foreigners later, was a way to justify the occupation of Tianjin showing how the presence of the foreign powers improved the area. The foreigners, though, were certainly not in Tianjin to improve the landscape and the living conditions of the natives.

According to Maurizio Marinelli, certain sources about the Italian Tianjin reveal the construction of an instrumental narrative emphasizing, on one hand, the positive role of Italians in China, and, on the other, the transformation of a humiliating colonial past into a good opportunity for China's development into a modern liberal globalized nation. A good example is the catalog of a photographic exhibition held in December 2004 at Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Beijing, *Sulla via di Tianjin: mille anni di relazioni tra Italia e Cina. Un quartiere italiano in Cina* (Cardano & Porzio, 2004). On the book cover, you can see Japanese children, certainly, and embarrassingly, mistaken for Chinese (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, cover page). The catalog contains a good collection of photos and archival documents about the Italian concession from 1902 to the 1930s. According to Marinelli, the title is deliberately misleading: the Italian concession in Tianjin was not a neighbourhood but a "state within a state". The improper word "quartiere/neighbourhood", mystifies the historical context in order to produce an over-positive image of the colonial presence as a form of "benign colonialism". The term "quartiere" conveys both the idea of a defined district and that of a community based on some forms of personal contacts and familiarity. This definition masks the true Italian aggressive colonial experience in China, on one hand, and, on the other, it is in line with the present intention of the Chinese authorities to represent the period of the concessions as the beginning of Tianjin's internationalisation and capitalist globalisation, obliterating the colonial past in order to make the colonial buildings into attractions for foreign capitals and domestic consumers (Marinelli, 2007, p.

132). Far from being an area for friendly neighbours living together, the Italian concession was, nevertheless, restructured and rebuilt with the intention to preserve its Western-style roads and the European style elegant residences.

In the concession, the Chinese presence was often ignored and despised. The Italian Consul had the right to have buildings pulled down if they did not conform to the Building Regulations. All public entertainments had to be authorized by the police while a special permission was required to open Chinese theaters which had to respect morality and safety rules imposed by the Italian authorities (Marinelli, 2007, p. 134). The Chinese had to keep their homes clean, including the road in front of their houses. Another form of discrimination established that any native of bad character had to be expelled by the concession, which indicates a power with a high level of discretion (Marinelli, 2007, p. 135).

The dominant neo-Renaissance style of the Italian consular buildings can be interpreted as a way to affirm the prestige of Italy and its positioning at the same level as the other colonial powers. In fact, the style had become popular in Europe, especially between 1840 and 1890, and neo-Renaissance buildings were present in the French concession, too (Marinelli, 2007, p. 137).

During the fascist time, the narrative of a benign colonialism reached its climax with an emphasis on the contrast between a negative past transformed into a positive present by the fascists. The past was backward and hopeless, while the present showed improvement, progress and modernity. It was a hagiographic picture of the Italian "civilising mission" based on the claim that Italy's was a "proletarian colonialism", therefore less pernicious than the others, since it aimed at securing greater prosperity to the indigenous people (Cavallarin & Henry, 2012, p. 166). The Italian concession became an expression of "Italianness", a model of morality, modernity and hygiene, with its large roads, elegant buildings, a modern hospital, the availability of electricity, potable water and sewage systems.

Dr Ugo Bassi, holding a lecture on "Italy and China" at the Fascist University of Bologna in 1927, described the Italians as lovers of knowledge and adventure, proud of their humanist culture and glorious Roman past. They just wanted to take civilisation, aid and rescue to other populations, they distinguished themselves in China because they did not commit the terrible crimes that the other foreign troops committed (Marinelli, 2007, p. 139). He was contradicted, among the others, by Giuseppe Messerotti Benvenuti (1870–1935) whose 400 photos and 58 letters were in the catalog of the 2004 exhibition (Cardano & Porzio, 2004, p. 8). Masserotti mentioned the massacres and the atrocious excesses of the Italian soldiers too, who were not less cruel than the military of the other concessions. If they happened to do less damage, it was just because they sometimes arrived later, when the villages had already been plundered and destroyed (Marinelli, 2007, p. 142).

The image of an Italian benign colonialism is in contrast with the content of the Chinese historical sources, at least till the 1980s. Chinese sources see Italy in line with the other nations. Italy, Belgium and Austria were latecomers in the scramble for concessions, but they imitated the aggressiveness of the others using military alliances and aggressive warfare (Marinelli, 2007, p. 144). Some articles describe stories of gambling, drug use and illegal trafficking as being specific in the Italian concession. The Christian cult was perceived as a sign of imperialism, too (Marinelli, 2007, p. 145). The Chinese did not take the Italian concession for relevant; in a *History of Tianjin* (Yanjiusuo, 1987, p. 208), e.g., just three lines are dedicated to the whole history of the Chinese-Italian relations (Marinelli,

2007, p. 142). The confrontation of Italian and Chinese sources helped to unmask the beguiling narrative of a positive "civilizing" Italian intervention in Tianjin (Marinelli, 2007, p. 147). More recent Chinese sources give a positive representation of the colonial past because it is seen as the beginning of Tianjin's internationalisation and participation in global neoliberalism.

Conclusion

My short essay focused on the history of the Italian concession in Tianjin from its origin in 1901, to its return to the Chinese Government in 1947. I traced the main historical events, the relationship between Italy and China and how the interpretation of the Italian presence changed according to the different following periods and the different points of observation. The Italian concession represented for the Italian authorities an imperialist conquest boosting national pride, especially during the fascist era, and proving that Italy was not inferior to the other European Great Powers. The administration of the concession, though, did not provide many economic advantages. Dissenting voices, like that of the *Corriere della Sera* journalist Luigi Barzini, revealed the hypocrisy behind the myth of Italy's "civilising mission", what the British call "the white man's burden". The Chinese interpreted the Italian presence in their territory as an act of aggressive imperialism and as a humiliation for China and its people. This point of view, though, changed in time according to the different regimes governing China and the new trends of the global economy. The Maoist leaders condemned the presence of the Great Powers in China as an imperialist violation of China's right to self-determination. In time, this interpretation weakened as soon as China joined the group of neoliberal countries in the globalized world. Starting from the 1980s, the foreign presence in China in the first half of the XX century, was seen as the first step of China's internationalization, while the architectural and cultural heritage of the past is now evaluated as a positive incentive to tourism and to the economic and cultural exchanges between East and West.

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From Earth to Sky, Reality to Dream
The Cypresses in Vincent van Gogh's Paintings

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Abstract

In Vincent van Gogh's paintings, the flame-like cypresses tower, as he described them, "tall and massive". Enlarged beyond their natural size, they dominate the scene, forming a vivid bridge between earth and sky, the tangible and the eternal. The earth represents the material world, while the sky, linked by van Gogh to dreams, suggests infinite imagination. Thus, the cypresses signify more than a vertical thrust; they trace a passage from outward reality to inner articulation, from objective depiction to subjective expression. In van Gogh's artwork, objects transcended their original meanings and became allegories or symbols. The cypresses painted by van Gogh were not only trees but also a projection of van Gogh himself. "Tall and massive" in comparison to their surroundings, they are different but, at the same time, lonely. Today, van Gogh is recognized as a "giant" and a pioneer in art history. During his lifetime, however, his work received little recognition and was often considered incomprehensible, causing the artist great mental distress. For van Gogh, art — like true love — was "lofty" and "sacred." He often visualized it as a starry sky, a realm he linked to religion and dreams. Notably, he rarely placed cypresses at the center of his canvases; instead, they stand to one side or the other, alone or in clusters, as if guarding that shimmering heaven imbued with divine significance. It was a love he pursued but perhaps never fully fulfilled. On 27th July 1890, van Gogh shot himself in the chest with a revolver; two days later he died at the age of 37, leaving over 850 paintings and 1300 works on paper behind.

Keywords: Vincent van Gogh, modernism, cypress symbolism and allegorism, imitation and creation

"I don't know if you'll understand that one can speak poetry just by arranging colours well, just as one can say comforting things in music. In the same way the bizarre lines, sought out and multiplied, and snaking all over the painting, aren't intended to render the garden in its vulgar resemblance but draw it for us as if seen in a dream, in character and yet at the same time stranger than the reality."[2]

Vincent van Gogh to Willemien van Gogh, Arles, Monday, 12th November 1888

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[2] Vincent van Gogh to Willemien van Gogh, Arles, Monday, 12th November 1888, Letter #720, from Vincent van Gogh, the Letters (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum and Huygens Institute, 2011), https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let720/letter.html.

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Introduction

From 22nd May to 27th August, 2023, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York delighted visitors with the special exhibition "van Gogh's Cypresses." The flame-like cypresses depicted in van Gogh's paintings (Fig. 1) are, in the artist's own words, "tall and massive." [3] Exaggerated compared to their actual scale, these trees dominate their surroundings, creating a powerful visual link between earth and sky, between the tangible and the eternal. The earth symbolizes the physical world, while the sky, which van Gogh associated with dreams, symbolizes infinite imagination. Thus, the cypresses, ascending toward the stars, represent more than just a vertical movement upwards; they also represent an inward journey from external reality to inner subjectivity, from physical existence to profound contemplation.

In the nineteenth century, Vincent van Gogh as well as other modern artists began to move away from the tradition of precise imitation, embracing instead a more dynamic style of artistic expression.[4] This transition from objective observation to subjective expression and from external description to inner articulation is clearly evident in van Gogh's artistic development. Van Gogh's early Dutch period (1881–1885) exemplifies the stage of

[3] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Tuesday, 25th June 1889, Letter #783, https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let783/letter.html#translation.

[4] Goethe identified three stages in an artist's development: Einfache Nachahmung (simple imitation), Manier (manner or stylization), and Styl (style as the expression of essence). These stages are neither strictly linear nor mutually exclusive; rather, they are interrelated and often coexist within an artist's trajectory.
Einfache Nachahmung der Natur: „Wenn ein Künstler, […], sich an die Gegenstände der Natur wendete, mit Treue und Fleiß ihre Gestalten, ihre Farben, auf das genaueste nachahmte, sich gewissenhaft niemals von ihr entfernte, jedes Gemälde, das er zu fertigen hätte wieder in ihrer Gegenwart anfinge und vollendete." (Simple imitation of nature: If an artist […] turned to the objects of nature, and with diligence and fidelity imitated their forms and their colors as precisely as possible, never straying from them in the slightest, conscientiously beginning and completing every painting he had to make in their presence.)
Manier: „[…] er erfindet sich selbst eine *Weise*, macht sich selbst eine *Sprache*, um das, was er mit der Seele ergriffen, wieder nach seiner Art auszudrücken, einem Gegenstande, den er öfters wiederholt hat eine eigne bezeichnende Form zu geben, ohne, wenn er ihn wiederholt, die Natur selbst vor sich zu haben, noch auch sich geradezu ihrer ganz lebhaft zu erinnern. Nun wird es eine Sprache, in welcher sich der Geist des Sprechenden unmittelbar ausdrückt und bezeichnet." (Manner: […] he invents a *manner* of his own, creates a *language* for himself in order to express, in his own way, what he has grasped with his soul — to give a distinctive, characteristic form to a subject he has often repeated, without having nature itself before him when he repeats it, nor even vividly recalling it. It now becomes a language in which the spirit of the speaker is directly expressed and made manifest.)
Styl: "Gelangt die Kunst durch Nachahmung der Natur, durch Bemühung sich eine allgemeine Sprache zu machen, durch *genaues und tiefes Studium der Gegenstände selbst*, endlich dahin, daß sie die Eigenschaften der Dinge und die Art wie sie bestehen genau und immer genauer kennen lernt, daß sie die Reihe der Gestalten übersieht und die verschiedenen charakteristischen Formen neben einander zu stellen und nachzuahmen weiß: dann wird der Styl der höchste Grad wohin sie gelangen kann; der Grad, wo sie sich den höchsten menschlichen Bemühungen gleichstellen darf. Wie die *einfache Nachahmung* auf dem ruhigen Dasein und einer liebevollen Gegenwart beruhet, die *Manier* eine Erscheinung mit einem leichten fähigen Gemüt ergreift, so ruht der *Styl* auf den tiefsten Grundfesten der Erkenntnis, auf dem Wesen der Dinge, in so fern uns erlaubt ist es in sichtbaren und greiflichen Gestalten zu erkennen." (Style: When art, through imitation of nature, through the effort to create a universal language, through *precise and profound study of the objects themselves*, finally reaches the point where it comes to know the properties of things — and the manner in which they exist — ever more precisely; when it surveys the range of forms and knows how to juxtapose and imitate the various characteristic shapes: then style is the highest level art can attain — the level at which it may be compared with the greatest human endeavors. Just as *simple imitation* rests on tranquil presence and loving attention, and *manner* seizes upon appearances with a light and receptive disposition, so *style* is grounded in the deepest foundations of knowledge — in the essence of things, insofar as we are permitted to apprehend it in visible and tangible forms.) (Goethe 1990, 186-191).

observation: he closely studied rural life and laborers, deeply influenced by realist painters such as Jean-François Millet (1814–1875). His palette was dark and earthy, his forms heavy and sculptural. A representative work from this "Brown Period" is *The Potato Eaters* (1885), a somber portrayal of peasant life rendered with raw sincerity. Later, van Gogh's years in France (1886–1890) marked the beginning of a turn toward stylistic exploration and personal expression. In Paris, he encountered the innovations of Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Japanese woodblock prints, which liberated his palette and expanded his formal vocabulary. His brushwork became more expressive, his compositions flatter, and his use of color increasingly symbolic. While these works still bear traces of stylistic borrowing, they already reflect a shift from external observation to inner interpretation — from reproducing nature to expressing the artist's inner state. This subjective impulse reached full maturity during his time in Arles, Saint-Rémy, and Auvers-sur-Oise. Van Gogh developed a deeply personal style characterized by dynamic, swirling brushstrokes, in which objective forms yield to subjective vision. Works such as *The Starry Night* (1889) and the *Sunflowers* series no longer aim to mirror the external world, but instead reconstitute it according to the inner rhythms of perception and feeling. Art thus arises from the artist's internal experience, liberated from conventional forms and constraints. It is precisely this boundless freedom that defines modernism — a path van Gogh boldly forged for the generations of modern artists who followed in his wake.

Cypresses: A Rebellion Against the Imitative Northern Dutch Painting Tradition

> The cypresses still preoccupy me, I'd like to do something with them like the canvases of the sunflowers because it astonishes me that no one has yet done them as I see them. It's beautiful as regards lines and proportions, like an Egyptian obelisk. And the green has such a distinguished quality. […] I think that of the two canvases of cypresses, the one I'm making the croquis of will be the best. The trees in it are very tall and massive. The foreground very low, brambles and undergrowth. Behind, violet hills, a green and pink sky with a crescent moon. The foreground, above all, is thickly impasted, tufts of bramble with yellow, violet, green highlights. I'll send you drawings of them with two other drawings that I've also done.[5]
>
> Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Tuesday, 25th June 1889

The towering cypresses in Vincent van Gogh's paintings are not only characteristic of the southern French landscape; they also form a striking contrast to the northern Dutch painting tradition, where cypresses were rare, and art was defined by a commitment to realism and the depiction of a single, transient moment. Vincent van Gogh, as well as other modern artists, experienced an artistic transformation from "eyes" to "imagination", "description" to "expression", as Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) wrote in *The Critic as Artist*: "[...] it is not the moment that makes the man, but the man who creates the age." (Wilde 2003, 1119.) In modern art, the transient moment no longer dominates the painting; instead, it is the artist's intention that takes precedence. So too are van Gogh's paintings — like his cypresses — a journey from earth to sky, from reality to dream, from exterior to interior. Unlike traditional Dutch paintings that meticulously reflect a reality perceived by the naked eye, van Gogh's art constructs a new world imbued with profound spiritual significance. As Wilde eloquently described, "He watched them, and their secrets became his. Through form and color, he re-created a world." (Wilde 2003, 1113)

[5] "'Impressions of Provence' […] But what does he want to say now when the olive trees, the fig trees, the vineyards, the cypresses must be more accentuated, all characteristic things, the same as the Alpilles, which must get more character." Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Saturday, 5th October 1889, Letter #808, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let808/letter.html.

Van Gogh's art does not imitate nature, it is instead, full of freedom. It is worth noting that cypresses are often described as a symbol of freedom and independence, as Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) wrote in the footnote to his translation of the *Diwan*:

> Die Lilie gilt unter den Blumen, so wie die Zypresse unter den Bäumen, für die Freie und Unabhängige; weil die eine und die andere hoch und frei aufschießt und der gerade Wuchs derselben von Ästen und Nebenzweig frei ist. Saadi sagte:
>
> Sei wie Palmen, fruchtbar, oder sei wenigstens wie Zypressen, hoch und frei. (Hafis 2013, 39)
>
> (Among flowers, the lily is regarded as the symbol of freedom and independence, just as the cypress is among trees, because both grow tall and free, and their straight growth is unencumbered by branches and twigs. Saadi said:
>
> Be like palm trees, fruitful, or at least like cypresses, tall and free.)
>
> Hafis: *Der Diwan. Die Auswahl der schönsten Gedichte. In der Übersetzung von Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall*

Van Gogh's art is no longer descriptive, but expressive, in which he wanted to "seek style": "the fact is that I feel myself greatly driven to seek style, if you like, but I mean by that a more manly and more deliberate drawing."[6] In *The Bedroom in Arles* (Fig. 2), the exterior reality (latin *realis* "factual") of van Gogh's bedroom was redefined by his mind in such a way that the viewer should come to repose or rest while looking at the painting, as the artist wrote to his brother Theo on October 16th, 1888:

> This time it's simply my bedroom, but the color has to do the job here, and through its being simplified by giving a grander style to things, to be suggestive here of rest or of sleep in general. In short, looking at the painting should rest the mind, or rather, the imagination.[7]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Tuesday, 16th October 1888*

Van Gogh's paintings reflect his strong artistic impulse. He purposefully altered the appearance of objects in his paintings to better communicate his intentions. His artwork *The Bedroom in Arles* bears little resemblance to his real bedroom in Yellow House in Arles. In this painting, there is little "imitation of nature": the space is distorted, and the shapes of the objects are drawn without correction. Van Gogh redecorated his room with strong color contrast, especially between complementary colors on the color wheel, such as green windows contrasting with red tiles or yellow furniture contrasting with blue/violet walls etc., to achieve a sensual balance and peaceful tranquility:

> The walls are of a pale violet. The floor — is of red tiles. The bedstead and the chairs are fresh butter yellow. The sheet and the pillows very bright lemon green. The bedspread scarlet red. The window green. The dressing table orange, the basin blue. The doors lilac.[8]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Tuesday, 16th October 1888*

In this painting, the walls and doors were originally violet, not blue. The change from violet to blue was the result of discoloration over the years. The discoloration had already begun during van Gogh's lifetime, as it had been damaged by damp while van Gogh was in hospital. (cf. Pickvance 1984, 191) The situation was noted in correspondence between the brothers. Theo wrote to Vincent on June 16th, 1889: "I'll send the Bedroom back to you, but you shouldn't retouch this canvas, (unless) it can be repaired. Copy it and send

[6] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, on or about Sunday, 3rd November 1889, Letter #816, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let816/letter.html.

[7] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Tuesday, 16th October 1888, Letter #705, https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let705/letter.html#translation.

[8] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Tuesday, 16th October 1888, Letter #705, https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let705/letter.html#translation.

that one back so that I can have it lined."[9] Despite the damage, van Gogh still considered the *Bedroom* one of his best paintings. "When I saw my canvases again after my illness, the one that seemed the best to me was the bedroom."[10]

In van Gogh's paintings, colors, the language of light and darkness, speak to their viewers, silent but powerful. They show a great vitality that imitation art never achieved. Artworks that aim to replicate reality are constrained. They are like shadows of nature, and therefore lack autonomy. In contrast, the colors in van Gogh's paintings speak for themselves, in a powerful and magical way:

> Certainly — imagination is a capacity that must be developed, and only that enables us to create a more exalting and consoling nature than what just a glance at reality (which we perceive changing, passing quickly like lightning) allows us to perceive.[11]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bermard, Arles, Thursday, 12th April 1888*

Van Gogh, as well as other modern artists, had revolutionized the old standard of art. His paintings reflect the inner state of his being. On the contrary, the traditional approach of imitation confines artists to a specific time and place, hindering their ability to explore a world beyond reality. The world viewed with the "eyes" is narrow, while the world explored with the "imagination" is wide, as Oscar Wilde highlighted in his *Critic as Artist*:

> He will turn from them to such works as make him brood and dream and fancy, to works that possess the subtle quality of suggestion and seem to tell one that [...] there is an escape into a wider world. (Wilde 2003, 1128)
>
> Oscar Wilde: *Critic as Artist*

The formulation "art teaches us to see" echoes Wilde's statement. Modern art teaches us to see not only with our physical eyes but also with our spiritual ones. In the "new" art, color and form transcend their descriptive purpose and assume a higher level of imagination. The new expressive approach of modernism does not correspond to our everyday experience. Instead, it asks us to leave our comfort zone, the "experience of familiarity," and explore an unknown realm, as Gombrich noted:

> In the sixth chapter of Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre*, the painter's rather simple-minded wife ventures to criticize him for painting a poplar quite blue. He makes her look at the motif and notice the delicate blue of the foliage. It was true, the tree was really blue, and yet she did not quite admit defeat; she blamed reality: there could not be blue tree in nature. [...] Her experience of familiarity, like that of everyone, was grounded on a knowledge of invariants, on what Hering called, [...] 'memory color'. (Gombrich 2002, 34)
>
> Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich: *The Image and the Eye. Further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation*

According to Lessing's *Laokoon* (eng. *Laocoon*), image, due to its inherent stillness, faces the severe challenge of selection, for it can only capture a specific moment. Unlike poetry and music, images in paintings, by their very nature, are always fixed and motionless. They cannot capture continuous movement, which can only be imagined by the viewer's mind. Therefore, the artist must choose the "most concise" moment that triggers the most vivid

[9] Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh, Paris, Sunday, 16th June 1889, Letter #781, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let781/letter.html.
[10] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Tuesday, 22nd January 1889, Letter #741, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let741/letter.html.
[11] Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bermard, Arles, Thursday, 12th April 1888, Letter #596, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let596/letter.html.

imagination so that the viewers can envision the action before and after that specific moment with their own comprehension:

> Die Mahlerey kann in ihren coexistirenden Compositionen nur einen einzigen Augenblick der Handlung nutzen, und muß daher den prägnantesten wählen, aus welchem das Vorhergehende und Folgende am begreiflichsten wird. (Lessing 2012, 116)
>
> (In its coexisting compositions, painting can use only a single moment of the action, and must therefore choose the most concise one, from which the preceding and following become most comprehensible.)
>
> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*

Van Gogh's innovative approach to painting resolved the challenges that art had previously encountered. By simplifying and reimagining reality through a fluid sense of motion, his work transcends the constraints of time and space. The objects in his paintings are no longer static or rigid, but instead appear animated and dynamic, imbued with a sense of continuous transformation. In *The Starry Night* (Fig. 3), there is no moment of reality crystallized. All the stars "sparkle" through wild brushstrokes and intense colors that convey strong emotion. The sky "flows" like *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* from Hokusai, in which shapes and colors are vividly and organically interwoven. They are as turbulent and dynamic as the artist's inner being.

In van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, the cypress tree — and likewise the church — serves as a strong vertical element within the composition, standing in sharp contrast to the predominantly horizontal rhythm of the village and the swirling curves of the night sky. Rising straight from the bottom edge of the canvas and reaching toward the top, the cypress cuts through the pictorial field with a palpable visual tension, as if it were attempting to pierce the boundaries of the frame itself. It functions as a window of inner passion embedded within the painting itself, forming a *mise en abyme* structure: images within images, thoughts within thoughts. This transgressive posture endows the cypress with a defiant energy. Instead of being passively contained by the frame, it challenges the very structure that encloses it. In this sense, the cypress becomes a symbolic rupture of desire, a visual embodiment of the soul's striving to transcend the physical boundary or art tradition. It represents the artist's inner resistance to the limits imposed by form, space, and matter — a metaphysical will to surpass the limitation. Oscar Wilde believed that it is the passion that give a painting its soul and movement, as stated in his work *The Critic as Artist*:

> Art is passion, and, in matters of art, Thought is inevitably colored by emotion, and so is fluid rather than fixed, and, depending upon fine moods and exquisite moments, cannot be narrowed into the rigidity of a scientific formula or a theological dogma. (Wilde 2003, 1144)
>
> Oscar Wilde: *The Critic as Artist*

In modern art, objective forms are reshaped — or even distorted — through the lens of subjectivity. In van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, the depicted objects take on an organic, flowing quality. Their expressive colors are no longer a lifeless imitation of reality, where hues exist in isolation without interaction. Instead, the colors are, in van Gogh's own view, autonomous and charged with "infinite" energy:

> There's something infinite about painting — I can't quite explain — but especially for expressing a mood, it's a joy. In the colors there are hidden harmonies or contrasts which contribute of their own accord, and which if left unused are of no benefit.[12]

[12] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, the Hague, 26th August, 1882, Letter #259, https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let259/letter.html#translation.

Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, the Hague, 26th August, 1882

In van Gogh's paintings, according to the Austrian author Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), one senses a harmony of hues in which "the colors lived, each for the sake of others"[13] Colors, despite their differences and contrasts, are interwoven in van Gogh's works as a unity and in movement. *The Starry Night* is so famous not because van Gogh succeeded in immortalizing a wonderful moment, a *punctum temporis*, as the old Dutch paintings did, but because in the artwork, one can still feel his impetuous mind or spirit, or, in Oscar Wilde's words, the "passion" in colors and form, as if the artist is talking to us.

The flame-like Cypresses, flowing Qualities and vibrant Colors in Modern Art

> The landscapes with the cypresses! Ah, that wouldn't be easy. Aurier feels it too when he says that even black is a colour, and about their flame-like aspect.[14] I'm thinking of it but I don't dare do it either, and say like Isaäcson, who is cautious, that I don't yet feel that we've reached that point. It requires a certain dose of inspiration, a ray from on high which doesn't belong to us, to do beautiful things. When I'd done those sunflowers I was seeking the contrary and yet the equivalent, and I said, it's the cypress.[15]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Saturday, 1st February 1890*

In van Gogh's paintings, art gradually became more expressive as it moved away from its descriptive past of mere imitation. Its purpose (*telos, τέλος*) ceased to depend upon the external world, becoming instead rooted within itself, an essential and revolutionary shift that defines Modern art in the broader context of art history. Van Gogh's abstract paintings are unrealistic but true. They require us to accept the dualities of "so and not so", "being and non-being". (cf. Rushdie 2021, 24) Perhaps this is why van Gogh was so fond of cypresses: they are not only trees of "death" but also of "life," characterized by their eternal green and everlasting vitality (cf. Lurker 1987, 440–441). The cypresses thus embody both opposites — death and life — at once. In a similar way, dualities such as the ebb and flow of the tides are united in the undulating motion of the waves: ever shifting, yet always in the same flow of movement.

Rather than relying on fixed forms, modern artists, such as van Gogh, diverged from their predecessors by adopting a distinct approach. The colors and brushstrokes they utilized became fluid and unencumbered, reflecting the ever-evolving nature that cannot be constrained or limited. In fact, van Gogh once compared the human heart to the sea, suggesting that its fluid nature best reflects our ever-changing selves: "The heart of man is very much like the sea; it has its storms, it has its tides, and in its depths it has its pearls too."[16] In the past, the moment an object was captured by the painter on canvas, it symbolically "died." In still life painting, although a fleeting moment is eternally suspended within the image, this very act of preservation reinforces the notion of *memento mori* — a reminder of the inevitability of death behind transient beauty. By contrast, van Gogh's

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[13] "Und nun konnte ich, von Bild zu Bild, ein Etwas fühlen, konnte das Untereinander, das Miteinander der Gebilde fühlen, wie ihr innerstes Leben in der Farbe vorbrach und wie die Farben eine um der andern willen lebten […]." (Hofmannsthal 2017, 98-99).

[14] Aurier referred to the poem "Rêve parisien" from Charles Baudelaire: "Et tout, même la couleur noire,/ Semblait fourbi, clair, irisé;/ Le liquide enchâssait sa gloire/ Dans le rayon cristallisé."

[15] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Saturday, 1st February 1890, Letter #850, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let850/letter.html.

[16] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Isleworth, Friday, 3rd November 1876, Letter #096, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let096/letter.html.

paintings foreground the vitality of nature. Through the wave-like rhythms of the natural world life is granted a second bloom in art, reanimated with motion and breath.

This evolution from static to dynamic lines marks not only a turning point in the visual rhythm of the artwork but also reflects a historical shift: the advent of photography in 1839, when Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) invented the eponymous daguerreotype process, thereby liberating art from its purely imitative function (Wolf 2002, 35–39). It also reflects a shift in which the artist redefines art as an expression, either of the individual's inner being or of a collective memory that unites us all. This approach is evident in van Gogh's expressive paintings through his vivid colors and wild brushstrokes or impastos. The former reflects the artist's passionate spiritual being and the latter the primitive, wild nature that lies in the subconscious of all living things.

The unusual spatial effect, as well as van Gogh's expanses of color, characterized by its boldness and strong contrasts, is, according to the artist himself, heavily influenced by *Ukiyo-e*, the Japanese woodblock print. The Japanese term *Ukiyo-e* literally means "picture of the floating world," its motifs range from history to folktales, from nature to people, from *kabuki* actors to eroticism, embracing every possibility in all walks of life. It is made for the collective society and not only for the elites, by communicating in a comprehensible way that even the non-intellectual can easily understand. It conveys life and strong energy that can be reflected in anyone's soul, just as van Gogh did with his energetic brushstrokes and vibrant palettes.

Van Gogh collected hundreds of Japanese woodblocks prints during his stay in Paris, mostly from Samuel Bing, a dealer in Oriental art. The artist recreated many *Ukiyo-e* such as *Plum Trees in Flower and Shower on the Ohashi Bridge near Ataka* from Utagawa Hiroshige. He also used *Ukiyo-e* as the background of his painting *Portrait of Père Tanguy*. These oriental artworks amused van Gogh a lot and were a source of inspiration. Van Gogh first expressed his fascination with Japanese prints in a letter to Theo on November 28th, 1885, after the World Exhibition held in Antwerp:

> My studio's quite tolerable, mainly because I've pinned a set of Japanese prints on the walls that I find very diverting. You know, those little female figures in gardens or on the shore, horsemen, flowers, gnarled thorn branches.[17]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Antwerp, Saturday, 28th November 1885*

Ukiyo-e is known for its solid colors, which create a dramatic and powerful effect, showing endless vitality. "Japanese art is something like the primitives, like the Greeks, like our old Dutchmen, Rembrandt, Potter, Hals, Vermeer, Ostade, Ruisdael. It doesn't end,"[18] wrote van Gogh to his brother Theo. During the 19th and 20th centuries in Paris, the Japanese woodblock print created a significant impact. Ernest Chesneau (1833–1890), a French art historian and critic, mentioned in his article Japan in Paris about this sensation:

> Man konnte nicht anders als sich verwundern über die Unvoreingenommenheit der Komposition, die Geschicklichkeit der Formen, den Reichtum an Tönen, die Originalität der malerischen Effekte und zur selben Zeit über die Einfachheit der Mittel, mit denen man diese Vielfalt an Resultaten erziehte. (Walther and Metzger 1992, 283)

[17] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Antwerp, Saturday, 28th November 1885, Letter #545, https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let545/letter.html.

[18] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 15th July 1888, Letter #642, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let642/letter.html.

> (One could not help but be amazed at the impartiality of the composition, the dexterity of the forms, the richness of tones, the originality of the painterly effects, and at the same time at the simplicity of the means by which this variety of results was obtained.)

The "simplicity" in the use of color and form in *Ukiyo-e* arises not only from the technical aspects of Japanese woodblock printing, but also reflects a deeper aesthetic philosophy. In woodblock printing, each color requires its own dedicated block. To achieve visual clarity and precision, this technique is characterized by flat surfaces, solid colors, and the absence of blending. Yet "less" does not mean lacking. Rather, it embodies a distinctly Japanese philosophy: through a limited palette, artists create powerful atmospheric resonance. This refined simplicity reflects the spirit of *wabi-sabi* (侘寂) and *ma* (間) — an appreciation of imperfection, incompleteness, and emptiness. By avoiding excess and embracing restraint, the artwork invites viewers into an open space of imagination and emotional participation. The simplicity of colors is also applied in van Gogh's art:

> While always working directly on the spot, I try to capture the essence in the drawing — then I fill the spaces demarcated by the outlines (expressed or not) but felt in every case, likewise with simplified tints, in the sense that everything that will be earth will share the same purplish tint, that the whole sky will have a blue tonality, that the greenery will either be blue greens or yellow greens, deliberately exaggerating the yellow or blue values in that case.[19]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bemard, Arles, Thursday, 12th April 1888*

Van Gogh used color to tell a new kind of story. Rather than beginning with the colors found in "nature", he started with those on his "palette". Though he observed nature closely, he did not follow the rules of mere imitation. Instead, he developed his own style through a deeply personal understanding of color — allowing his paintings to speak for themselves, to breathe, and to leave space for imagination, so they could truly communicate with the viewer:

> It's certain that by studying the laws of colours one can move from an instinctive belief in the great masters to being able to account for why one likes what one likes, and that's very necessary nowadays when one considers how terribly arbitrarily and superficially people judge. […] I still often run up against a blank wall when undertaking something, but all the same, the colours follow one another as if of their own accord, and taking a colour as the starting-point I see clearly in my mind's eye what derives from it, and how one can get life into it. […] May I not simply understand by it that a painter does well if he starts from the colours on his palette instead of starting from the colours in nature? […] I retain from nature a certain sequence and a certain correctness of placement of the tones, I study nature so as not to do anything silly, to remain reasonable — but — I don't really care whether my colours are precisely the same, so long as they look good on my canvas, just as they look good in life. […] A man's head or a woman's head, looked at very composedly, is divinely beautiful, isn't it? Well then — with painfully literal imitation one loses *that general* effect of *looking beautiful* against one another that tones have in nature; one preserves it by re-creating it in a colour spectrum PARALLEL to, but not necessarily exactly, or far from the same as the subject. […] Always and intelligently making use of the beautiful tones that the paints form of their own accord when one breaks them on the palette, again — starting from one's palette — from one's knowledge of the beautiful effect of colours, isn't the same as copying nature mechanically and slavishly. […] Now here's another example. Suppose I have to paint an autumn landscape, trees with yellow leaves. Very well — if I conceive it as — a *symphony in yellow*, what does it matter whether or not my basic yellow colour is the same as that of the leaves — it makes *little* difference. *Much*, *everything* comes down to my sense of the *infinite variety* of tones in the *same family*. […] If you think this a dangerous tendency towards romanticism, a betrayal of 'realism' — painting from the imagination — having a greater love for the colourist's palette than for nature, well then, so be it. […] COLOUR EXPRESSES

[19] Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bemard, Arles, Thursday, 12th April 1888, Letter #596, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let596/letter.html.

> SOMETHING IN ITSELF. One can't do without it; one must make use of it. What looks beautiful, really beautiful — is also right. […] *That is* truly painting — and the result is more beautiful than precise imitation of the things themselves. Thinking about one thing and letting the surroundings belong to it, derive from it. Making studies from nature, wrestling with reality — I don't want to argue it away. I've tackled it that way myself for years and years, almost fruitlessly and with all sorts of sad results. I wouldn't want to have missed that — error. Always carrying on in the same way would be folly and stupid, that's what I mean — but not that all my effort has been utterly in vain. One begins by killing, one ends by healing is a doctors' saying. One begins by fruitlessly working oneself to death to follow nature, and everything is contrary. One ends by quietly creating from one's palette, and nature is in accord with it, follows from it. But these two opposites don't exist without each other. […] Although I believe that the finest paintings are made relatively freely from the imagination, I can't break with the idea that one can't study nature, swot even, too much. The greatest, most powerful imaginations have also made things directly from reality that leave one dumbfounded.[20]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Nuenen, on or about Wednesday, 28th October 1885*

As in Japanese *Ukiyo-e*, "picture of the floating world", the themes in van Gogh's work were often drawn from everyday life, yet rendered in a distinctively artistic manner. In van Gogh favorite painting, *The Bedroom*, shadows are deliberately left out, subjects are flattened, and rules of perspective are not precisely applied. Van Gogh made this adaption so the painting would have the same visual impact as the Japanese *Ukiyo-e*, creating a two-dimensional effect. The importance of accuracy in external reality diminishes as van Gogh becomes more concerned with conveying a sense of what the room gave him and what he wanted his audience to receive. Anything that deviates from this goal is either omitted or distorted.

The asymmetrical composition also reflects the influence of Japanese *Ukiyo-e* and traditional Chinese landscape painting. By breaking away from the rigidity of symmetry, it adopts a more natural, dynamic, and vivid aesthetic. This imbalance draws the viewer's attention, as if the image were "tilting" in a particular direction. The large cypress in *The Starry Night*, positioned on the left side of the canvas, also suggests a temporal narrative. The eyes read from left to right, and the stars recede into the depths of the background, pointing toward a sense of temporal hope and anticipation for the future — or perhaps hinting at a spiritual fantasy that stretches into the distance.

Modern art combines the new with the traditional. Its turn to abstraction is influenced by both geographical and temporal distances, by the Orient and by antiquity. Van Gogh's organic, rhythmic brushstrokes — built up in wave-like layers of impasto — echo the meander motifs of ancient Greek art. Scholars see those Greek bands as emblems of life, drawn from the body itself: their undulating pattern evokes the steady pulse of the heart and the gentle rise and fall of breathing muscles. They hint at an unseen order pervading nature — the cycle of the seasons, the endless surge and retreat of the sea. In this sense the Greek meander, like van Gogh's swirling strokes, embodies a primal instinct shared by all living creatures, an impulse that lies beyond the reach of rational control. By viewing the artworks, the audience feels not only van Gogh but also themselves, a deep forgotten primitive force awakened by van Gogh's art. Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote down this strong impact in his *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* (eng. *The Letters of the Man who returned*) that he saw "his whole life" in van Gogh's paintings:

> Diese Farbe, die ein Grau war und ein fahles Braun und eine Finsternis und ein Schaum, in der ein Abgrund war und ein Dahinstürzen, ein Tod und ein Leben, ein Grausen und eine

[20] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Nuenen, on or about Wednesday, 28th October 1885, Letter #537, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let537/letter.html.

> Wollust – warum wühlte sich hier vor meinen schauenden Augen, vor meiner entzückten Brust mein ganzes Leben mir entgegen, Vergangenheit, Zukunft, aufschäumend in unerschöpflicher Gegenwart […]. (Hofmannsthal 2017, 104–105)
>
> (This color, which was a grey and a sallow brown and a darkness and foam, in which there was a chasm and a plummeting, a death and a life, a horror and an ecstasy - why was my whole life burrowing up towards me here before my looking eyes, before my enraptured breast, past, future, spuming up in boundless presence [...].)
>
> Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*

Van Gogh's paintings may initially seem "garish, unsettled, and quite rough and peculiar," as Hofmannsthal noted. However, they are more truthful than photography. When viewing the paintings, one senses "the essence, the indescribable-fateful":

> Ich mußte mich erst zurechtfinden, um überhaupt die ersten als Bild, als Einheit zu sehen – dann aber, dann sah ich, dann sah ich sie alle so, jedes einzelne, und alle zusammen, und die Natur in ihnen, und die menschliche Seelenkraft, die hier die Natur geformt hatte, und Baum und Strauch und Acker und Abhang, die da gemalt waren, und noch das andre, das was hinter dem Gemalten war, das Eigentliche, das unbeschreibliche Schicksalhafte. (Hofmannsthal 2017, 94–95)
>
> (I had first to find my bearings in order even to see the first ones as pictures, as a unity – but then, then I saw, then I saw them all in this way, every single one, and all of them together, and the nature in them, and the human power of soul that formed the nature here, and tree and bush and field and hillside which were painted there, and that other thing as well, that which was behind what had been painted, the essence, the indescribably fateful.)
>
> Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*

Vincent van Gogh unveiled, through his artworks, an invisible and unknown world to his audience — a world that encompasses both reality and imagination, the external and the internal, the individual and the collective. These dualities are fused and reimagined by the artist through his renewed understanding of *la surface, la ligne, la couleur* — the surface, the line, and the color — arriving at a fluid state between being and non-being, affirmation and negation. His paintings come alive, set in motion, flowing from the artist to the viewer.

Cypresses and Their Reflection in the Artist's Life

Van Gogh's paintings went beyond the descriptive function of art. Under his paintbrush, art became expressive as the artist imbued the physical world with his spiritual manifestation. In van Gogh's artwork, objects transcended their original meanings and became symbols. The cypresses painted by van Gogh were not only trees but also a projection of van Gogh himself. Trees grow upwards from their seeds, overcoming obstacles and challenges through their innate vitality. Cypresses, often found in rocky and arid areas where other plants and vegetation could not thrive, have demonstrated their ability to survive and are, therefore, the best example of this.

The cypresses in van Gogh's paintings are often compared to flames, reflecting the artist's ardent passion. Art was his inspiration, cure, and lifelong devotion, encompassing his past, present, and future. His urge to create was so intense and unstoppable that he literally continued to paint until his death when the flame burned out its last ashes. In the last 70 days of his life, he produced an impressive 80 paintings and 60 drawings (cf. Gaede 2010, 17).

Therefore, the cypresses depicted in van Gogh's paintings also represent the artist's enduring love for art. "Tall and massive" in comparison to their surroundings, they are

different but, at the same time, lonely. Today, van Gogh is recognized as a "giant" and a pioneer in art history. During his lifetime, however, his work received little recognition and was often considered incomprehensible by the general public, causing the artist great mental distress:

> Art often seems to be something very lofty and, as you say, something sacred. But that's true of love too. And the problem is simply that not everyone thinks about it like that, and those who feel something of it and allow themselves to be swept away by it suffer greatly, firstly because of being misunderstood, but as much because our inspiration is so often inadequate, or the work is made impossible by circumstances.[21]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to To Willemien van Gogh. Paris, late October 1887*

In fact, cypresses are sometimes criticized for their self-interest, with each branch and needle striving to grow upwards. Their pride prevents them from bending downwards, similar to van Gogh who aimed to break the rules and revolutionize the tradition:

> Was die Dichter und Hafis selbst der Zypresse sonst zum Lobe ausspricht, nämlich ihr freies, hohes, von allem irdischen Staube weit erhabenes, zurückgezogenes Wesen, wird ihr hier zum Tadel angerechnet; dass sie so hoch aufschießt, eh' sie Äste treibt, dass diese Äste nicht zur Erde gesenkt sind wie die der übrigen Bäume, sondern gerade wie der Stamm zum Himmel emporstreben, ist zwar sehr schön, meint Hafis, aber doch auch ein Zeichen von Selbstgenügsamkeit, die, alle Verbindung und Berührung mit dem mütterlichen Boden verschmähend, gar wohl den Vorwurf der Selbstsucht verdient. Hierin steht nun die Zypresse weit hinter dem Freunde, der des eben so hohen Wuchses wegen gelobt, aber nicht der Selbstsucht beschuldigt zu werden verdient. Hafis betrachtet hier nur die Kehrseite der Medaille, den insgemein wird die Zypresse nur gepriesen als das Symbol der Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit, so wie die Palme als das Symbol der Großmut und Freigebigkeit. So sagt Saadi:
>
> Sei wie Palmen, gültig, oder sei
>
> Wie Zypressen, hoch und frei. (Hafis 2013, 55)
>
> (What poets and Hafiz themselves praise about the cypress, namely its free, lofty, secluded nature, far above all earthly dust, is here held against it; that it shoots up so high, before it puts out branches, that these branches are not bent down toward the earth like those of other trees, but strive upward toward the sky just like the trunk, is very beautiful, says Hafiz, but also a sign of self-sufficiency which, spurning all connection and contact with the maternal soil, certainly deserves the accusation of selfishness. In this respect, the cypress falls far short of its friend, which is praised for its equally tall stature but does not deserve to be accused of selfishness. Hafiz is only looking at the other side of the coin here, as the cypress is generally praised as a symbol of freedom and independence, just as the palm tree is a symbol of generosity and magnanimity. As Saadi says:
>
> Be like palm trees, valid, or be
>
> Like cypresses, tall and free.)
>
> Hafis: *Der Diwan. Die Auswahl der schönsten Gedichte. In der Übersetzung von Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall*

In van Gogh's paintings, the starry sky is often accompanied by the cypresses. In fact, the divine significance of the cypress tree can be traced back to the Zoroastrian religion, when two cypresses flanked the urn of fire, the center of the religion. In Persian and later Arab culture, the cypress is also depicted on carpets as the Tree of Life, in which all pairs of opposites are harmonized into one unity. Interestingly, cypresses are rarely placed in the center of van Gogh's paintings. Instead, they are often found on either side of the canvas,

[21] Vincent van Gogh to To Willemien van Gogh. Paris, late October 1887. Letter #574, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let574/letter.html.

either singly or in groups. This not only creates a more pleasing landscape composition but also reflects the divine significance of the cypress, which originated in Zoroastrian culture and was later adopted by Christianity and other religions. In the Zoroastrian religion, cypresses guard the sacred fire, and in van Gogh's paintings, they guard the starry sky, where van Gogh associated with dreams and therefore imbued with divine significance. Art, as "true of love", is something that van Gogh described as "lofty" and "sacred". It is often depicted as a starry sky, which van Gogh associated with religion:

> And it does me good to do what's difficult. That doesn't stop me having a tremendous need for, shall I say the word — for religion — so I go outside at night to paint the stars […].[22]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh. Arles, on or about Saturday, 29th September 1888*

The tall, solitary cypress — often seen as a reflection of van Gogh himself — stands guard over this unattainable dream. According to Socrates who recounts a conversation he once had with a wise woman named Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* (200a – 212c), love (*eros*) is defined by striving and longing. It possesses a fluid, ever-changing nature and is never complete in itself; for that which is perfect has no need to hope for anything. Love is not a god, as many assume, but a *daimon* — a spiritual being that mediates between the mortal and the divine. It is neither fully beautiful nor entirely good, nor is it ugly or evil; rather, it occupies an in-between state, as Eros (Ἔρως, personification of "love") is the child of Poros (Πόρος, personification of "resourcefulness") and Penia (Πενία, personification of "poverty"). Therefore, love is characterized by lack and desire. It desires beauty precisely because it does not possess it. In this vision, love is a dynamic force that compels the soul to ascend from the physical to the metaphysical, from the transient to the eternal. It is not a state of completion, but a movement — a striving that bridges the earthly and the divine. For van Gogh, art, an ultimate goal of an artist, was perhaps like the starry sky, so sacred and symbolic that he, as a mortal, found it inaccessible in reality. It was a love he aspired to, but perhaps never fully grasped and fulfilled:

> For art, now — for which you need time, it wouldn't be bad to live more than one life. And it's not without appeal to believe in the Greeks, the old Dutch and Japanese masters, continuing their glorious school on other globes.[23]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Sunday, 15th July 1888*

This unfulfilled love for art may have contributed to his suicide. Ultimately, as van Gogh wrote in his letter, one can only "take death to reach a star. […] while alive, [one] cannot go to a star, any more than once dead [one could] be able to take the train."[24] Today, the reasons for his suicide remain a myth; some say he died because of lack of recognition, some say it was because of his mental illness, and some say it was because van Gogh believed that death could lead to another world where art could be fully realized.

It is unfair and inaccurate to view van Gogh's art as solely a product of his mental illness, or to suggest that his creative use of vibrant colors and bold brushstrokes was merely a result of his mental breakdown. Instead, I see art as a higher existence and as healing and comfort in the artist's life. Van Gogh's painting did not depict a sad world. His colors are bright and delightful rather than dark and gloomy:

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[22] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh. Arles, on or about Saturday, 29th September 1888, Letter # 691, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let691/letter.html.

[23] Vincent van Gogh To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Sunday, 15th July 1888, Letter #642, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let642/letter.html.

[24] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Monday 9th or Tuesday 10th July 1888, Letter #638, https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/highlights/letters/638.

> The uglier, older, meaner, iller, poorer I get, the more I wish to take my revenge by doing brilliant colour, well arranged, resplendent."[25]
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Willemien van Gogh. Arles, Sunday, 9th and about Friday, 14th September 1888*

In contrast to his painful reality, van Gogh's art is full of liveliness. "The sight of the stars always makes me dream,"[26] as van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo. Perhaps this is why van Gogh favored the motif of starry night so much because he associated the stars with dreams, where a brief respite from the pain of life is possible. And the cypresses, an allegory of both death and life, love and beauty, in his paintings connect him with this world, which is the opposite of painful reality. The tranquil village depicted in *The Starry Night* creates a stark contrast to the vibrant sky. The former is dark and quiet, while the latter is bright and vivid:

> Just as we take the train to go to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to go to a star. What's certainly true in this argument is that while alive, we cannot go to a star, any more than once dead we'd be able to take the train. So it seems to me not impossible that cholera, the stone, consumption, cancer are celestial means of locomotion, just as steamboats, omnibuses and the railway are terrestrial ones. To die peacefully of old age would be to go there on foot (Ibid.).
>
> *Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Monday 9th or Tuesday 10th July 1888*

Vincent van Gogh did not choose a peaceful death. He chose a faster way to reach the star, which took him only 36 hours, but in great physical pain. On July 27th, 1890, van Gogh had shot himself in the chest with a revolver. The reason for his suicide remains unknown. However, the artist did not die instantly but staggered back from the wheat field to his room at the Auberge Ravoux. His brother Theo rushed from Paris on hearing the news and stayed with him until his death on July 29th. Theo later described the event in a letter to his sister Elisabeth: "He himself desired to die. While I was sitting beside him, trying to persuade him that we would heal him, and that we hoped he would be saved from further attacks, he answered: 'La tristesse durera toujours.' I felt I understood what he wished to say. Shortly afterward, he was seized with another attack, and the next minute closed his eyes." (cf. Hulsker 1996, 480) Vincent van Gogh was only 37 years old at the time of his death, leaving over 850 paintings and 1300 works on paper behind. It was not until the skillful promotion of his sister-in-law Jo van Gogh-Bonger (1862–1925) that van Gogh acquired his international fame, a recognition he aspired to.

Conclusion

> Ne crois pas que les morts soient morts
> Tant qu'il y aura des vivants
> les morts vivront, les morts vivront.
> (Smit & Luijten 2023, 86)
> (Don't believe that the dead are dead.
> While there are people still alive,
> the dead will live, the dead will live.)

The "engineer" Vincent van Gogh, the son of Jo van Gogh-Bonger and Theo van Gogh, quoted these lines during his speech on the opening of the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh on June 2nd, 1973. Van Gogh's impact on art was revolutionary. Unlike traditional

[25] Vincent van Gogh to Willemien van Gogh. Arles, Sunday, 9th and about Friday, 14th September 1888, Letter #678, https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let678/letter.html.
[26] Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Monday 9th or Tuesday 10th July 1888, Letter #638, https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/highlights/letters/638.

Dutch paintings that meticulously reflect reality, van Gogh's art constructs an entirely new world imbued with profound personal expression and emotional intensity. His palette, once dark and earthy, explodes into luminous yellows, vibrant blues, and burning oranges — colors that no longer describe the world but reimagine it. The towering cypresses in van Gogh's works are more than mere features of the southern French landscape; rendered in deep greens and undulating blacks against swirling skies of cobalt and gold, they symbolize a metamorphosis from physical existence to infinite dreams and imagination. This artistic shift marks a rebellion against traditional northern Dutch painting, where the cypress is virtually absent and fidelity to natural appearance remained the dominant ideal. Van Gogh's visionary approach liberated painting from the constraints of mere imitation, guiding us toward a realm where the visible merges with the visionary, where vibrant color from his palette becomes the medium of inner expression. His cypresses — at once turbulent and serene, death-haunted yet vibrant with life — stand as enduring symbols of his relentless pursuit of his love for art, as an eternal dialogue between the tangible world we inhabit and the infinite landscapes of artist's inner being. In his paintings, external facts give way to a deeper, chromatic articulation of the inner self, resulting in a language of color that is not descriptive, but existential — a powerful form of expression that has never faded and still resonates today.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: *Wheat Field with Cypresses* (1889)

Vincent van Gogh, Oil on canvas, 732 × 934 mm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 2: *Bedroom in Arles* (1889)

Vincent van Gogh, oil on canvas, 570 x 740 mm, Musée d'Orsay

Fig. 3: *The Starry Night* (1889)

Vincent van Gogh, oil on canvas, 737 x 920 mm, Museum of Modern Art

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Images (Figures)

Fig. 1. Van Gogh, V. (1889). *Wheat field with cypresses* [Painting]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436535

Fig. 2. Van Gogh, V. (1889). *Bedroom in Arles* [Painting]. Google Art Project. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_van_Gogh_-_Van_Gogh%27s_Bedroom_in_Arles_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Fig. 3. Van Gogh, V. (1889). *The starry night* [Painting]. Google Art Project. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VanGogh-starry_night.jpg

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Magical Realism and Colonial Shadows: Cultural Resistance in Joaquin's *The Legend of the Dying Wanton*

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Abstract

This paper examines Nick Joaquin's short story *The Legend of the Dying Wanton* through the lens of cultural identity, historical recovery, and magical realism. Often misunderstood for its invocation of Spanish Catholic imagery, Joaquin's narrative instead offers a subtle form of postcolonial resistance by reviving a repressed legend from early seventeenth-century Manila. Building on contemporary interpretations of Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity and Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space, this paper contends that Joaquin's incorporation of miraculous elements, Gothic motifs, and symbolic relics serves a deeper purpose. Rather than romanticizing the past, these features operate as instruments for recovering cultural memory. Through the characters of Currito Lopez and Doña Ana de Vera, Joaquin portrays the layered complexities of colonial identity, voicelessness, and the burden of unresolved history. The miraculous survival of a dying soldier and the mud-stained robes of the Virgin Mary become mnemonic devices that challenge dominant nationalist and colonial narratives alike. Furthermore, Joaquin's deliberate silences and focus on spectral presences reflect the historiographic gaps of the colonial archive. By reanimating forgotten myths through magical realism, Joaquin not only retrieves suppressed narratives but redefines Filipino identity as something shaped by entanglement, trauma, and continuous reinterpretation. This paper positions Joaquin's work as a literary intervention into the politics of memory, offering new ways to understand the intersections of faith, history, and postcolonial resistance.

Keywords: *Nick Joaquin, Filipino identity, magical realism, postcolonial literature, cultural memory, colonial hybridity*

Introduction

Nick Joaquin remains one of the most complex voices in Filipino literature, especially on matters of cultural memory and nationhood. His literary style, deeply historical, layered with religious imagery, and often bordering on the magical, has provoked admiration and controversy in equal measure. The Legend of the Dying Wanton, a short story first published in Prose and Poems (1952) and later included in Tropical Gothic (1972), is one such piece where these complexities are fully dramatized. The narrative revolves around the miraculous transformation and redemption of Currito Lopez, a sinful Spanish soldier who harbors a secret devotion to the Virgin Mary. What makes this story compelling is not only its folkloric texture and Gothic imagery but also its powerful commentary on the entangled layers of colonial, religious, and cultural identity in the Philippines.

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This paper seeks to re-examine Joaquin's story through the lens of cultural resistance, especially how magical realism functions as a medium of retrieving repressed colonial narratives. Joaquin's invocation of an obscure miracle from the early seventeenth century allows him to engage in an act of cultural remembering, an act that deliberately runs counter to both nationalist erasure and American neo-colonial narratives of modernity. His storytelling method, often described as "tropical gothic," becomes a way to reanimate forgotten layers of the Filipino past, which includes the uncomfortable reality of Spanish influence. Far from being an apology for colonialism, Joaquin's story opens up a nuanced dialogue about the formation of Filipino identity and the importance of acknowledging how history, faith, and myth are woven into the cultural psyche.

Joaquin's work is often misunderstood because of his refusal to conform to nativist ideologies that idealize a pre-Hispanic golden age. Instead, he insists on tracing the birth of Filipino cultural consciousness to the arrival of the Spaniards and the Catholic faith. This approach has drawn criticism for romanticizing colonization, but as Arong (2016) suggests, Joaquin's persistent engagement with the Spanish past should be seen as a form of cultural resistance against American imperialism and intellectual Westernization. It is precisely in works like The Legend of the Dying Wanton where this resistance takes on a subtle, symbolic form. The miracle in the story, loosely based on real ecclesiastical records, becomes a metaphor not just for spiritual redemption but for cultural awakening, a process that Joaquin believes is rooted not in denial but in remembrance.

In examining this story, the paper will draw on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, particularly his ideas on identity as a process of "becoming" rather than a static essence. This view resonates with Joaquin's vision of Filipinoness as an evolving construct, formed in interaction with historical forces and cultural tools. Through this lens, The Legend of the Dying Wanton may be read as an attempt to confront the colonial shadows without being subsumed by them. It reclaims magical realism as a technique not just for aesthetic play, but for cultural excavation—a way of illuminating how myths, miracles, and historical fragments can offer alternative visions of national selfhood.

Theoretical Framework

To fully grasp the depth of Nick Joaquin's 'The Legend of the Dying Wanton,' one must explore it through the lenses of cultural identity, postcolonial memory, and the complexities of hybridity. These concepts offer insight into how Joaquin reconstructs forgotten colonial narratives and imbues them with symbolic and spiritual significance. The story is not simply a religious tale—it is a literary intervention into the politics of memory, identity, and cultural survival. This theoretical framework draws on key ideas from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and magical realism to better understand Joaquin's artistic strategy.

Identity plays a pivotal role in Joaquin's narratives. Within postcolonial frameworks, it is no longer seen as something static or inherited, but rather as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by historical disruptions and the interweaving of diverse cultures.

Cultural identity, as redefined by contemporary scholars, is now widely understood as a dynamic construct, historically shaped and contextually embedded. Hall's foundational claim that identity is formed "through difference and representation" and is "a matter of becoming as well as of being" (p. 225) still holds relevance. According to Hall (1990), identity in postcolonial settings is shaped not by a fixed historical foundation, but by

experiences of disruption, displacement, and cultural blending. This resonates strongly with Joaquin's vision of the Filipino self, which he presents not as a return to a pre-colonial golden age but as a hybrid construct born from the collision between native traditions and Spanish Catholicism. Joaquin does not mourn the loss of a pure Filipino identity; rather, he explores how that identity was shaped through colonial experiences and how cultural memory survives in fragmented but enduring forms.

In The Legend of the Dying Wanton, this process of becoming is dramatized through Currito Lopez, a Spanish soldier whose life straddles sin and sanctity, death and redemption, colonizer and convert. Currito becomes more than a man, he becomes a metaphor for the dual consciousness Joaquin believes resides in every Filipino. This duality recalls what Linda Hutcheon (1989) described as the "postcolonial doubled identity and history" (p. 154), where identity is not singular or linear but fractured and split, looking both to the colonizer and to the colonized self. Joaquin's tale exemplifies this fractured identity, one that has not been erased by the colonial encounter but has been reconfigured by it.

Recent literary scholarship continues to emphasize how postcolonial narratives turn to folklore and religious motifs not simply to recover the past, but to critique dominant historical narratives. As Glatch (2022) notes, the use of magical realism by postcolonial writers is often an act of resistance, and "many magical realism authors used the genre with subtle political intent, criticizing or subverting the political unrest". Joaquin's use of the miraculous, the Virgin's muddy robes, and the shared visions between Currito and Doña Ana, are not there to romanticize faith, but to recover a cultural archive that has been rendered obsolete by modernist, American-oriented narratives of history.

Through magical realism, Joaquin accesses what Sarkowsky (2008) describe as a "contact zone" between myth and modernity. This zone, particularly in postcolonial fiction, allows the supernatural to intervene in historical memory. In the story, the relics of the Madonna are not merely religious symbols, they function as mnemonic devices, echoing "cultural palimpsests", layered memories that exist beneath the surface of dominant history. By weaving the miraculous into a documented historical setting (Manila, 1613), Joaquin resists both erasure and dogmatism. He uses the tools of the storyteller, legend, vision, prayer, not to fabricate truth but to gesture toward the multiplicity of truth in Filipino consciousness.

This hybrid perspective is further supported by the concept of the "third space," a term popularized by Homi K. Bhabha and later reexamined by contemporary scholars. While the term "hybrid" has roots in fields like linguistics and botany, within literary and cultural theory it signifies the experience of existing between cultural boundaries—embodying multiplicity, fusion, and syncretism (Payne & Barbera, 2010, p. 339). Bhabha's "third space" serves as a metaphor for cultural interaction, a site where hybrid identities are not simply formed in resistance to colonial authority, but through a dialogic process with it. Joaquin's narrative unfolds within such a space: colonial Manila, a city shaped by Spanish influence, Catholic traditions, and indigenous adaptations.

Characters like Doña Ana, Currito, and even the marginalized native figures inhabit this in-between realm, where meanings are fluid and constantly redefined. As Bhabha (as cited in Easthope, 1998) emphasizes, this space is not harmonious, it is marked by friction, ambiguity, and contradiction. Tension is a defining feature of postcolonial identity. In The Location of Culture (1994), Homi K. Bhabha describes how identity emerges in the spaces where cultural differences intersect and shift. These in-between zones, what he calls

"interstices", are where shared understandings of nationhood, community, and cultural meaning are constantly negotiated. Rather than reinforcing fixed categories, these spaces allow for hybrid identities that embrace difference without enforcing a strict hierarchy (p. 2). In this light, Joaquin's narrative does not attempt to harmonize opposing forces. Instead, it deliberately shows them as they are. The interplay between colonial and indigenous influences, between religious conviction and doubt, and between myth and historical reality, all reflect the layered and often contradictory nature of Filipino cultural memory.

In sum, the theoretical concepts of cultural hybridity, postcolonial memory, and magical realism frame The Legend of the Dying Wanton not just as a Gothic tale, but as a text deeply embedded in the cultural politics of identity. Joaquin's narrative strategy serves as a subtle form of resistance, against the forgetting of colonial history, against the simplification of national identity, and against the dominance of modernist narratives that exclude the miraculous and the folkloric.

Cultural Resistance and Historical Recovery in The Legend of the Dying Wanton

Nick Joaquin's short story stands as a quiet yet potent example of literary resistance. At first glance, the narrative seems like a simple retelling of a pious miracle. However, beneath its lyrical surface lies a critical engagement with the politics of memory and the role of colonial archives in shaping Filipino identity. Through the use of historical fiction, forgotten ecclesiastical legend, and the subversive presence of magical realism, Joaquin reconstructs a repressed Spanish-era narrative, not to glorify colonialism, but to reclaim cultural memory from both erasure and distortion.

The story is framed around the miraculous survival of Currito Lopez, a sinful Spanish soldier in the early 1600s, who, after being mortally wounded in a battle in Ternate, remains alive for thirteen days to confess his sins. The miracle, witnessed and affirmed by Doña Ana de Vera, a noble and devout woman, is tied to her vision of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Childexplores. This miraculous occurrence, far from being a simple religious fable, dramatizes Joaquin's unique philosophy: history is never clean or linear; it is muddied, contradictory, and encoded in symbols and visions. As highlighted in Table 1, the story includes miracles, hallucinations, repressed Spanish narratives, and the sense of living in a "two-fold world"—each contributing to its Gothic and postcolonial complexity.

-	Miracles, odds, and magic realism,
-	Hallucination, dream, the exotic,
-	Repressed narratives of the Spanish past
-	Living in a two-fold world.

Tab. 1: Gothic Elements in *The Legend of the Dying Wanton*

What makes Joaquin's method culturally subversive is his decision to build the narrative on a hidden and repressed ecclesiastical legend. This legend, referenced briefly in Hornedo's historical research (1978), originates from 17th-century Spanish Catholic tradition in Manila, an era often overlooked in nationalist discourse that prefers to center

the Revolution of 1896 or American occupation. Joaquin resurrects this marginal legend not as an endorsement of colonial spirituality, but as a literary strategy to shift attention to the Spanish period as the matrix of identity formation, rather than a historical detour to be dismissed.

This narrative retrieval is embedded in the very architecture of the story. Joaquin creates two overlapping worlds: one rooted in faith, visions, and spiritual encounters, and the other grounded in historical time and space, Manila in 1613. This literary dualism reflects the Gothic notion of a "two-fold world" identified in multiple stories by Joaquin. The magical encounter does not escape history, it invades it. When Doña Ana sees the muddy robes and scraped boots of the Child Jesus, the dream becomes material. The divine leaves its mark on physical reality. This moment is not merely magical; it is mnemonic. As Shaw (2023) explain, postcolonial narratives frequently draw on supernatural motifs not to hide history, but to reveal truths that official historical accounts have neglected or erased. Joaquin's depiction of the Virgin and the Child walking through the mud alongside Currito becomes a symbol of cultural immanence, divine presence embedded within the Filipino landscape and history. Instead of offering transcendence, the miracle is deeply rooted in earthly detail: the mud, the boots, the trauma of a dying man. Such realism underscores the hybridity of Joaquin's worldview, aligning with contemporary readings of magical realism as a political tool. Benito, Manzanas, and Simal (2009) stress that in postcolonial fiction, magical realism functions as an intervention into the historical record, allowing writers to access cultural memories occluded by colonial or nationalist epistemologies.

One of the more haunting elements in the story is its treatment of native characters. They are present but nameless, often occupying the periphery of the narrative. This has been rightly criticized by some for marginalizing the Filipino subject. However, Joaquin's selective silence may not be erasure but rather a reflection of the colonial archive itself, where natives were often anonymized or removed from official stories. Joaquin's decision to reframe a Spanish soldier's miracle through the eyes of a pious mestiza woman can thus be read as a critique of the archive rather than complicity with it. In this way, the story works within a framework of haunted history. The past, haunts the present in several of Joaquin's key works. The miracle that anchors this story does not resolve the tension between colonizer and colonized, it renders it legible. Currito's prolonged suffering, his failure to name his native victims, and the silence surrounding his sin offer no redemption in the nationalist sense. Instead, Joaquin presents a deeply ambiguous recovery of memory: a miracle tinged with guilt, a vision muddied by sin, and a history preserved not in monuments but in the whispers of stories.

This form of resistance can be better understood through Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space." Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural meaning is produced in a space of contradiction and ambiguity, where established identities break down and new, hybrid forms begin to take shape (p. 37). Joaquin's depiction of Manila in 1613 embodies this liminal space—it is simultaneously sacred and brutal, shaped by both European and indigenous influences, and suspended between historical fact and mythic imagination. Rather than presenting clear-cut heroes, the narrative offers spectral figures who move through a world of uncertainty and contested truths.

Even Currito's survival becomes symbolic. It is not a triumph but a burden. His lingering body becomes a metaphor for unresolved guilt, delayed confession, and the long afterlife of colonial violence. Following Hall's notion of identity as an ongoing process of 'becoming,' Currito's miracle does not signify a return to an original state of purity, but rather reflects an unresolved journey of self-confrontation and transformation.

In the end, Joaquin uses the story not to rewrite the past, but to reinsert its complexities into public consciousness. In recovering a lost legend and casting it in the genre of tropical gothic, he not only destabilizes the myth of Spanish benevolence but also challenges the nationalist fantasy of pre-colonial purity. His act of resistance lies in his refusal to simplify. As Joaquin writes history into fiction, he also writes fiction into history, opening a space where memory, miracle, and mourning co-exist. As Arong (2016) notes, Joaquin's literature resists both colonial nostalgia and nationalist amnesia by re-inscribing the untidy textures of the past into contemporary discourse (p. 116).

Magical Realism and the Materialization of Myth in *The Legend of the Dying Wanton*

Nick Joaquin's literary style is often described as baroque, gothic, and even antiquated, but one of its most striking and enduring features is his nuanced use of magical realism. In The Legend of the Dying Wanton, magical realism is not merely a stylistic device, it is a narrative act of cultural recovery. The story becomes a space where myth and magic do not transcend reality but materialize within it. In Joaquin's world, miracles are not suspensions of reality, they are manifestations of the forgotten, the repressed, and the unresolved.

Joaquin's short story revives a little-known seventeenth-century miracle to illustrate how Filipino culture is inseparable from its Spanish-Catholic inheritance. His plot weaves together two archival threads that scholars have traced: a 1613 report of the soldier Don Francisco (Currito) Lopez's wondrous survival and a separate Santo Domingo convent tradition about mud-stained garments taken from the images of the Virgin and Child, preserved by devotees led by Doña Ana de Vera. Although the historical testimonies—heard in Manila's walled city in 1621—differ over details such as López's length of suffering and even the participants' names, Joaquin shows little interest in settling those contradictions. Instead, he dramatises them, recasting Francisco as "Currito," foregrounding Spanish characters (Currito, Doña Ana, Gonzalo Salgado) and staging their encounter with the sacred to animate what archival silence had repressed. In doing so, he demonstrates that legends, relics and conflicting chronicles can be recombined to keep a culturally formative past alive, not for strict historical accuracy but for imaginative re-engagement with Filipino identity.

In The Legend of the Dying Wanton, the central miracle, the survival of Currito Lopez for thirteen days after being mortally wounded, forms the magical axis of the narrative. His body, kept alive by the unseen presence of the Virgin and the Holy Child, becomes a symbol not just of personal redemption but of cultural endurance. Currito's slow death and eventual confession happen in a liminal space between sin and grace, between dream and waking life. Joaquin's realism is grounded in mud-stained robes and worn sandals, objects that bear testimony to a spiritual event, yet also to a cultural reality: the Catholic imagination is embedded in Filipino soil, marked by both violence and transcendence.

This dynamic is reinforced by the story's visual and sensory details. When Doña Ana finds the Virgin's robes stiff with mud and the boots of the Holy Child scraped and dirty, the miraculous is grounded in material signs. This moment is not allegorical; it is literal within the story's logic. It signals what Prickett and Timmermans (2022) call "palimpsestic memory", a layering of myth over historical trauma to preserve, rather than erase, the past (p. 29). The miracle leaves traces, physical, dirty, undeniable. It is through these traces that Joaquin asserts the legitimacy of myth as a form of memory. In the Filipino cultural context, where history has often been mediated or silenced by colonial powers, these miraculous signs become a counter-archive.

According to Table 1 of this study, The Legend of the Dying Wanton contains multiple gothic and magical realist features: "miracles, odds, and magical realism," "hallucination, dream, the exotic," and "living in a two-fold world." These elements are not decorative; they are integral to how the story constructs meaning. The reader is not asked to suspend disbelief but to believe in multiplicity. As Benito, Manzanas and Simal (2009) argue, magical realism creates a world where different systems of logic can coexist without collapsing into each other. Joaquin's narrative embodies this coexistence, creating a Manila where visions matter as much as documents, and mud is as sacred as ritual.

Moreover, the setting, Manila in 1613, functions as a crucible of hybrid belief systems. Christianity is still young in the islands, and indigenous traditions likely remain embedded in the popular consciousness, even if not explicitly depicted. By choosing this period, Joaquin emphasizes a historical moment of religious and cultural negotiation. The miraculous intervention of the Virgin and the Holy Child may be read not just as an act of grace but as a reimagining of colonial spirituality filtered through native soil. The mud on the robes signifies both the reality of physical suffering and the earthbound nature of Filipino religiosity. This approach also allows Joaquin to question dominant narratives of heroism and sin. Currito is not a heroic figure. He is "the wanton," a man associated with vice and likely with acts of cruelty during his service in the colonial army.

It is here that Joaquin diverges from both colonial piety and nationalist secularism. He does not reject religion, but neither does he idealize it. Instead, he recovers it as a repository of folk memory, of cultural fragments that can be repurposed in the postcolonial moment. In fact, Joaquin offers a different kind of resistance, one that does not negate the past but transforms it into a resource for identity formation.

Silence, and Identity in Joaquin's Colonial Characters

In The Legend of the Dying Wanton, Nick Joaquin does not present a world of binary oppositions between colonizer and colonized, saint and sinner, history and myth. Rather, he presents a liminal landscape where characters are caught in the complexities of colonial hybridity and historical amnesia. Identity in Joaquin's narrative is not something fixed or inherited, it is fractured, haunted, and negotiated in silence. Characters in the story do not represent colonial figures; they are morally ambiguous and culturally hybrid characters. By crafting these figures, Joaquin explores identity as a contested space, echoing Stuart Hall's claim that cultural identity is "always in process, never complete, and shaped by history and representation" (p. 222).

Currito, for instance, is not a noble figure. His initial portrayal aligns with the brutal and entitled image of the Spanish soldier in the colonial Philippines. Yet, as the story progresses, he becomes more than a stereotype. His suffering, prolonged for thirteen days, forces the reader to see him not only as a colonizer but also as a broken man—a figure awaiting both personal and spiritual redemption. His survival is framed as miraculous, yet Joaquin complicates that miracle. It does not exonerate Currito. Instead, it highlights his entrapment within a system of violence, guilt, and silence. He becomes a metaphor for the unresolved legacies of the Spanish past in the Filipino psyche.

While The Legend of the Dying Wanton presents richly drawn characters, it is also marked by intentional silences—particularly in its portrayal of native Filipinos. Notably, no Filipino characters are named, and the story unfolds entirely through the perspectives of Spanish or Spanish-affiliated figures. This narrative choice has sparked debate, with some critics

questioning whether Joaquin reinforces colonial viewpoints. However, a more nuanced interpretation sees this absence not as a dismissal, but as a deliberate reflection on the nature of colonial documentation. By replicating the structure of the colonial archive—where native voices are often omitted or marginalized—Joaquin draws attention to the historical gaps and exclusions that continue to shape cultural memory.

Likewise, Doña Ana's role as a visionary challenges traditional gender and colonial roles. She is not a nun or a saint, yet she bears witness to a divine event. Her voice becomes the story's moral compass, not because she commands authority, but because she listens to silence. She notices what others overlook: the mud on the robes, the wear on the boots. These small, material signs become vehicles of truth. This attention to detail aligns with what Sant (2023) describe as the feminist turn in magical realism, where women's bodies, senses, and experiences are centered as sites of knowledge. Doña Ana embodies this turn by being both subject and observer, living proof that history is not only written in documents but also in footprints and fabric.

On one hand, Joaquin's privileging of colonial characters can appear to center Spanish perspectives. On the other hand, he uses those perspectives to reveal a deeper truth about postcolonial identity—that it is often formed not through assertion but through negotiation, not through voice but through echo.

Conclusion

Nick Joaquin's short story opens a window into the obscured and often uncomfortable spaces of the Philippine colonial past—where myth blends with memory, and silence coexists with moments of the miraculous. The story resists idealizing either the oppressor or the oppressed, instead presenting a nuanced narrative in which the sacred and the historical intertwine. Through this intersection, Joaquin portrays cultural identity not as a fixed inheritance but as something shaped through tension, negotiation, and the act of remembering what history has tried to suppress. In reimagining a forgotten miracle from 1613, Joaquin does not glorify the Spanish past; he reclaims it as part of the Filipino cultural self, complex, hybrid, and still in the process of becoming.

Joaquin also uses magical realism not merely as a stylistic choice, but as a means of materializing myth and challenging dominant historical narratives. The miracle of Currito's prolonged survival, the mud on the Virgin's robes, and the quiet vision of Doña Ana all speak to a form of cultural resistance rooted not in confrontation but in remembrance. These supernatural elements are not escapist, they are mnemonic. They help us recover what has been lost or silenced in official records. They act as narrative relics, each one carrying fragments of memory, faith, and historical grief.

Equally important is Joaquin's depiction of identity as inherently fractured. His colonial characters, especially Currito and Doña Ana, are not unidimensional. They embody the contradictions of their time: sinners who seek salvation, witnesses who see but cannot explain, hybrids who neither fully belong to the empire nor escape its influence. By foregrounding these figures, Joaquin emphasizes that Filipino identity is not born from purity but from entanglement. It is formed in the space between conquest and miracle, between silence and vision, between the Holy Child's muddy boots and the soldier's dying confession.

The story's silence regarding the native voice has also been explored—not as an oversight but as a strategic reflection of colonial erasure. Joaquin does not fill in the gaps with easy

answers. Instead, he allows absence to speak. The voicelessness of the Filipino characters mirrors their exclusion from the colonial archive, and it is in this silence that the reader is asked to listen more deeply. Joaquin's resistance is subtle, even spectral. It does not raise a flag; it raises a question: what have we forgotten, and why?

Joaquin's work, especially in this story, insists that the Spanish colonial period, often dismissed or reduced in nationalist discourse, still haunts the Filipino psyche, not as a ghost to be exorcised but as a memory to be understood. For Joaquin, the miraculous functions chiefly as a storytelling device: it re-illuminates half-lost byways of history and invites readers to revisit places that time has rendered indistinct.

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Fotografien von Kranken aus dem kolonialen Kamerun: humanitäre Hilfsbedürftigkeit oder Invektivität? Eine Bildanalyse pathologisierter Körper am Beispiel ethnografischer Fotografien

Romuald Valentin Nkouda Sopgui[1]

Abstract

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht Fotografien von Kranken aus dem kolonialen Kamerun (1884–1918), die im Rahmen ethnografischer Sammlungen um 1914 entstanden sind. Der Aufsatz geht der Frage nach, inwiefern sich bereits in ethnografischen Fotografien aus dem kolonialen Kontext des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts das Bestreben beobachten lässt, geografisch weit entferntes menschliches Leid zu visualisieren und mögliche Handlungen der Hilfeleistung sichtbar zu machen. Anhand einer Bildanalyse pathologisierter Körper wird der ambivalente Charakter dieser Aufnahmen zwischen humanitärer Hilfsrhetorik und invektiver Abwertung herausgearbeitet. Die Fotografien erscheinen einerseits als visuelle Zeugnisse medizinischer Fürsorge, die die koloniale Selbstlegitimation als zivilisatorische Mission stützten. Andererseits reproduzieren sie durch die Inszenierung von Krankheit und körperlicher Devianz rassistischen Stereotypen, die die koloniale Herrschaftsordnung stabilisieren. Der Aufsatz stellt heraus, wie die Ästhetik der Darstellung- etwa durch Posen, Bildausschnitte und Begleittexte die Wahrnehmung der Abgebildeten zwischen Empathie und Entmenschlichung oszillieren ließ. Im Fokus steht dabei die Funktion der Bilder in einem kolonialen Wissens- und Machtdiskurs, der Körper als Projektionsflächen für europäische Konstruktion von Krankheit, Minderwertigkeit und „Andersein" instrumentalisiert. Koloniales Bildarchiv zum Thema Krankheit wirft Fragen allgemeiner ethischer Natur (Menschenwürde) sowie des Opferschutzes und der Persönlichkeitsrechte auf.

Schlüsselwörter: *Kolonialgeschichte, ethnographische Expeditionen, Fotosammlungen, medizinische Fotos, Verunglimpfung*

Abstract

This article examines photographs of the sick from colonial Cameroon (1884–1918), which were taken as part of ethnographic collections around 1914. The essay explores the extent to which ethnographic photographs from the colonial context of the early 20th century already reveal efforts to visualise geographically distant human suffering and to make possible acts of assistance visible. Based on an image analysis of pathologised bodies, the ambivalent character of these photographs between humanitarian aid rhetoric and invective devaluation is worked out. On the one hand, the photographs appear as visual evidence of medical care that supported colonial self-legitimisation as a civilising mission. On the other hand, by staging illness and physical deviance,

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they reproduce racist stereotypes that stabilise the colonial order of domination. The essay highlights how the aesthetics of representation - for example through poses, image details and accompanying texts - caused the perception of those depicted to oscillate between empathy and dehumanisation. The focus here is on the function of the images in a colonial discourse of knowledge and power that instrumentalises bodies as projection surfaces for the European construction of illness, inferiority and 'otherness'. Colonial image archives on the subject of illness raise questions of a general ethical nature (human dignity) as well as the protection of victims and personal rights.

Keywords: *Colonial history, ethnographic expeditions, photo collections, medical photos, denigration.*

Extended Abstract

Photographs of the Sick from Colonial Cameroon: Humanitarian Need for Aid or Invectivity? An Image Analysis of Pathologized Bodies Using the Example of Ethnographic Photographs

In the early twentieth century, colonial photography emerged not only as a documentary tool but also as an instrument of visual power, shaping narratives about colonised peoples in Africa. In the context of German colonial rule in Cameroon (1884–1918), photographic representations of the indigenous population, particularly images depicting sick and pathologised bodies, served complex and often conflicting purposes. The article examines individuals from colonial Cameroon, interrogating the underlying intentions and effects of these images. Through a critical image analysis, this study seeks to uncover the ideological frameworks and power structures embedded within these portrayals.

The corpus for analysis is drawn from ethnographic collections, including the photographic work of the Austrians ethnographic collectors Rudolf and Helene Oldenburg and German colonial figures Günter Tessmann included other less-known doctor Felix Mohn operating in Cameroon during the colonial period. The selected photographs depict individuals with visible signs of disease, deformity, or physical suffering, often captured in sided and frontal poses or arranged against the neutral backgrounds, as per the conventions of scientific imagery of the time. These images are read alongside their original captions and associated textual annotations providing a layered understanding of their context and intended reception.

In conjunction with 'invectivity studies', which are characterised by cultural and social sciences, 'disability studies' and historical image research, the photographs examined here can be assigned to the category of 'humanitarian photography'. The latter approach is intended to refer to the entire historical field of the interpretation, use and function of images in a colonialist-ethnological context, which served precisely to generate support for others who were perceived as being in need of help for various reasons. Recent historical scholarship increasingly emphasises the central role of the media in the historical formation of cross-border suffering. The use and diverse authentication functions of images, especially photographs, are increasingly becoming the focus of research.

The methodological framework combines visual and colonial studies and medical anthropology. First, a pictorial analysis dissects the composition, staging, and visual codes with the images. Second a colonial lens is applied to analyse the asymmetrical power relations inherent in the act of photographing a vulnerable body under colonial conditions. Third, insights from anthropology of the body and medical humanity inform the discussion

of how, illness and corporeal difference were constructed and instrumentalised within colonial discourses. The analysis reveals that the photographs operated simultaneously on several registers. On one level, they purported to document pathological case for scientific and medical purposes, claiming on objective, clinical gaze. However, this claim to neutrality is undermined by visual strategies that emphasize otherness, abjection, and degradation. The sick body was framed as a marker of racial inferiority and civilizational backwardness, thereby justifying colonial intervention under the guise of a "civilising mission." The imagery of suffering bodies thus contributed to a narrative of humanitarian necessity, calling for medical assistance while simultaneously reinforcing racial hierarchies and stigmatising African corporeality.

A particularly striking finding is the tension between visual rhetoric of compassion and that of contempt. Some photographs were circulated in humanitarian appeals, were the pathologised body was presented as object of pity, mobilising European audiences to support medical missions and colonial health initiatives. Yet in scientific and ethnographic contexts, similar images often stripped the subjects of individuality and agency, reducing them to specimens of racialized disease for Western consumption. This dual function suggests that the visualisation of illness in colonial contexts was not merely descriptive but deeply performative, instrumentalising suffering for divergent ideological ends.

Moreover, this article highlights the implications of forced posed, bodily exposure, and the lack of consent inherent in many of these images. Sick individuals, often photographed semi-nude or in medical revealing positions, were rendered hyper-visible in ways that today would be recognised as ethically problematic. The camera thus not only recorded but actively produced forms of bodily vulnerability and social marginalisation.

This study contributes to current debates in visual studies by foregrounding the role of medical imagery in colonial visual regimes. It argues that photographs of sick bodies in colonial Cameroon should be understood not as transparent records of humanitarian concern or pure scientific interest, but as artefacts of a broader biopolitical project that conflated care and control, compassion and domination. In doing so, the article calls for a critical reassessment of ethnographic archives and advocates for more ethical curatorial practices when dealing with sensitive colonial-era imagery.

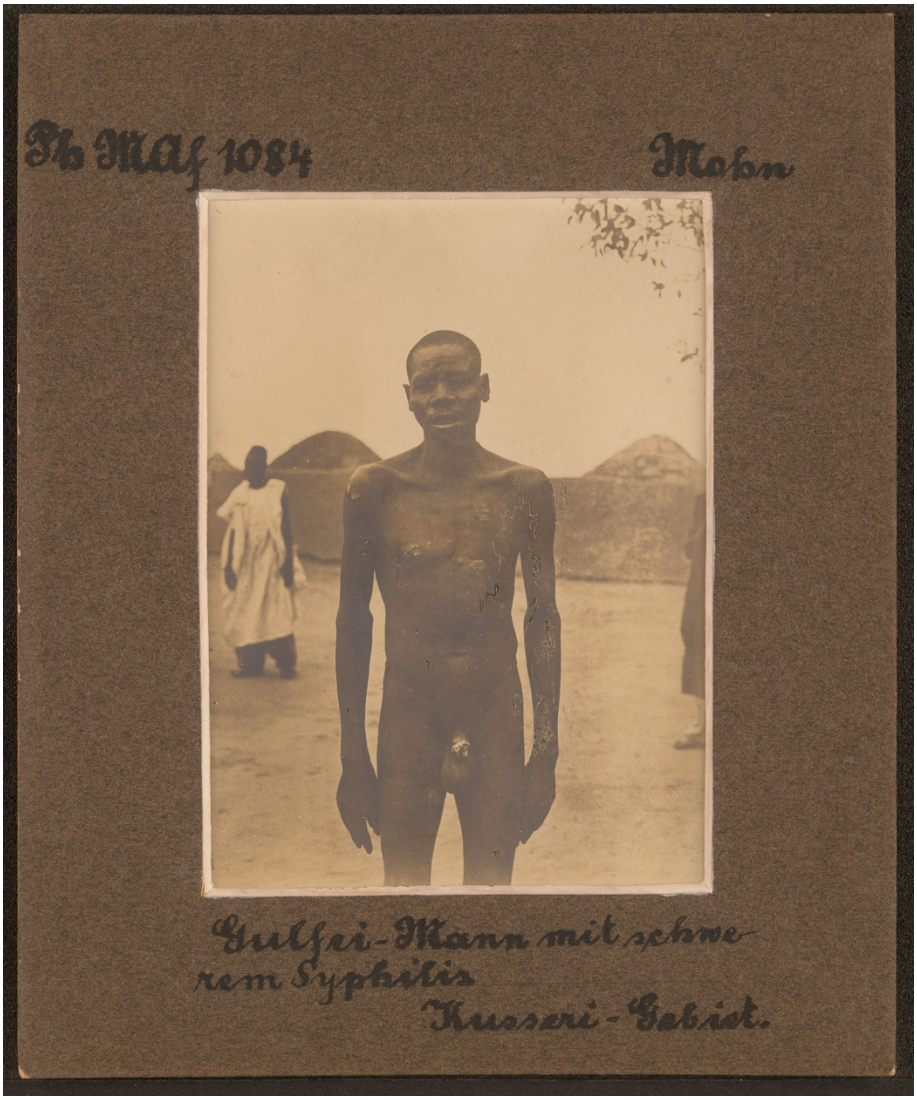

Abb. 1: GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Fotograf: Felix Mohn„ Inventarnummer PhMAf 1084, Gulfei-Mann mit schwerem Syphilis, Kusseri-Gebiet (Region),. 1908–1909, Kousséri, Kamerun

1. Einleitung

Das Einstiegsfoto (Abb. 1) mit der Bildunterschrift „Porträt eines Mannes mit schwerer Syphilis, (Kusseri)" ist Teil der fotografischen Sammlung von Paul Felix Mohn (*15.07.1879 in Oschatz †17.10.1914 bei Mahiwa, D.O.A.), einem Sanitätsoffizier der „Schutztruppe für Kamerun", die im GRASSI, Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig aufbewahrt wird. Das Bild lässt sich in die Kategorie von Krankheitsfotografien einordnen. Ein unbenannter Mann der ethnischen Gruppe der Gulfei (heutiger äußerster Norden Kameruns) wird stehend mit entblößtem Oberkörper dargestellt. Deutlich sichtbar sind die Symptome einer fortgeschritten Syphilis, unter anderem großflächige Hautläsionen und Gewebeschädigungen. Der Bildhintergrund bleibt neutral und unspezifisch, wodurch der Fokus vollständig auf dem pathologisierten Körper legt. Die Aufnahme entstand im Rahmen kolonialmedizinischer Kampagnen zur Erfassung endemischer Krankheiten und spiegelt damalige wissenschaftliche Praxis wider, indigene Krankheitsbilder visuell zu dokumentieren und kategorisieren. Das fotografische *Setting*, die Darstellung und die Betextung (Gulfei-Mann mit schwerer Syphilis) veranschaulichen die Spannung zwischen einer scheinbar humanitären Intention, medizinischen Hilfeleistung und invektiven, entwürdigenden

Repräsentation des kolonialen Anderen. Weitere Krankheitsfotografien aus Kamerun zur Kaiserreichen Kolonialzeit sind in deutschsprachigen Museen und Archiven verstreut. Um nur einen Fall zu nennen: in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren gelangte eine umfangreiche Sammlung von Objekten, Fotografien und Originalnegativen des österreichischen Kaufmanns Rudolf Oldenburg und seiner Ehefrau Helene, die Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts viele Jahre in Kamerun lebten, sammelten und fotografierten, in das Museum für Völkerkunde Wien. Die meisten Bilder, die im weitesten Sinne in einem ethnologischen Forschungskontext aufgenommen und weitergegeben wurden, hatten einen hohen Stellenwert als authentische Zeugnisse, schufen Repräsentationen der lokalen Realitäten und gingen in den europäischen Bilderhaushalt über (Wiener, 1990, S.9). Solche Aufnahmen wurden oft im Rahmen anthropologischer und medizinischer Dokumentationen gemacht, um „typische" Erscheinungsbilder verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen festzuhalten. Dabei wurden häufig körperliche Auffälligkeiten (wie Krankheiten und besondere Merkmale) betont, um sie für wissenschaftliche Vergleiche zu nutzen. Wissenschaftliches Interesse ist auch bei der Fotografie von Anomalien ausschlaggebend, wie die fotografischen Aufzeichnungen der Kolonialzeit zeigen (Theye, 1989).

Gegenstand des vorliegenden Beitrags ist das humanitäre und invektive Potential des kranken menschlichen Körpers aus einer kolonialistisch visuellen Perspektive. Der Beitrag untersucht anhand von ausgewählten Beispielen von Krankenfotografien aus dem kolonialen Kamerun unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft, inwiefern diese als „Schlagbilder"[2] (Warburg, 1920, S. 469; Diers, 1997, S. 7), als beleidigende und damit invektive Körper- bzw. Affektbilder meinungsbildend und öffentlichkeitswirksam agierten. Verunglimpfungen, die durch Herabwürdigung des Körpers und seiner Bilder die soziale und symbolische Positionierung des „Einheimischen" treffen sollen, finden sich besonders häufig im ethnographisch-kolonialen Kontext. Die visuelle Darstellung von kranken Körpern weist darauf hin, dass die Fotografie genutzt wurde, um körperliche „Anomalien" als Marker kultureller Differenz festzuhalten. Die Analyse der fotografierten Menschen unter dem Aspekt „Körper" versucht den Körper als Ort von Zuschreibungen zu erfassen, ob diese politischer, sozialer, ethnischer oder medizinischer Art sind (Jäger, 2009, S. 155). Der Aufsatz geht der Frage nach, inwiefern sich bereits in ethnografischen Fotografien aus dem kolonialen Kontext des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts das Bestreben beobachten lässt, geografisch weit entferntes menschliches Leid zu visualisieren und mögliche Handlungen der Hilfeleistung sichtbar zu machen. Ziel ist es, aufzuzeigen, dass Krankenfotografien der Dokumentation und wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis dienten, indem sie pathologisierte Körper als humanitäre Bedürftigkeitsbeweise präsentierten. Auf der anderen Seite soll gezeigt werden, dass Krankenfotografien häufig Teil einer invektiven Bildpolitik waren, mit der koloniale Fremdheit und kulturelle Machtstrukturen visuell festgeschrieben und legitimiert wurden.

In Verbindung mit der kultur- und sozialwissenschaftlich geprägten „Invektivität Studies", den „Disability (Behinderung) Studies" und der historischen Bildforschung lassen sich die hier untersuchten Fotografien in der Kategorie der „humanitären Fotografie" zuordnen. Mit dem

[2] Schlagbilder sind solche Bilder, die einen „gesteigerten Gefühlswert" haben und auf eine bestimmte Wirkung zielen. Der Kunsthistoriker Aby Warburg entwickelte den Begriff während des Ersten Weltkriegs im Zuge der damaligen Presse-Berichterstattung. Den Begriff des „Schlagbilds" bezog er auf den Ausdruck „Schlagezeile" im Sinne des „Aufmachens" der Titelseite einer Zeitung. Daher sprach er im Hinblick auf reformatorische Flugblätter von einem „Bilderpressefeldzug" und „leidenschaftlicher Schlagbilderpolitik". Der Terminus wurde in jüngerer Zeit erneut von Michael Diers aufgegriffen. Diers führt aus, dass den Schlagbildern in Anlehnung an Schlagworte „[…] sowohl eine prägnante Form wie auch ein gesteigerter Gefühlswert eigentümlich ist, insofern sie […] entweder einen bestimmten Standpunkt für oder wider ein Streben, eine Einrichtung, ein Geschehnis nachdrücklich betonen oder [sie, Anmerkung des Verfassers] doch wenigstens gewisse Untertöne des Scherzes, der Satire, des Hohnes und dergleichen deutlich mit erklingen lassen."

letztgenannten Ansatz soll auf das gesamte historische Feld der Deutung, Verwendung und Funktion von Bildern im kolonialistisch-ethnologischen Kontext verwiesen werden, die gerade dazu dienten, Unterstützung für andere zu generieren, die aus unterschiedlichen Gründen als hilfsbedürftig wahrgenommen wurden. Die neuere Geschichtswissenschaft betont vermehrt die zentrale Rolle der Medien für die historische Formung grenzüberschreitenden Leidens. Dabei rücken die Verwendung und die vielfältigen Beglaubigungsfunktionen von Bildern, insbesondere von Fotografien, zunehmend in den Fokus der Forschung. Heide Fehrenbach und Davide Rodogno haben umfassend und systematisch die Geschichte der von ihnen so genannten „humanitären Fotografie" diskutiert, deren Entstehung, Verbreitung und Professionalisierung sie weltweit in unterschiedlichen politischen, institutionellen und gesellschaftlichen Kontexten des 19. Jahrhunderts verorten:

> Historically, humanitarianism emerged and evolved in tandem with photographic technologies. By the second half of the nineteenth century, photography was increasingly used to generate empirical knowledge of previously unseen worlds: from the spiritual to the material, from the microscopic to the cosmic, from the sociological to the anthropological. Missionaries, reformers, and journalists began to employ photos in illustrated books and lantern-slide lectures to focus public attention on select examples of human misery in the world […] a central element of humanitarian photography has been a focus of visualizing the human body as vulnerable, under threat, in pain. So too is the mandate – expressed via images, caption, and the text- for viewers to respond, to recognize their moral 'duty', whether as Christians, imperial subjects to address human suffering (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, S. 3–4).

Der Aufsatz knüpft an neuere geschichts- und kulturwissenschaftliche Ansätze an, die Fotografien nicht nur in ihren semantischen Strukturen, sondern auch in ihrer Objekthaftigkeit und damit als Artefakte oder Gegenstände analysieren, die in spezifischen Kontexten verwendet wurden und Funktionen erfüllten. Der Bildauswahl, die hier untersucht wird, liegt ein „seriell-ikonografischer" Ansatz zugrunde. Damit können sowohl Einzelbilder als auch umfangreiche Bildbestände gezielt erschlossen werden (Pilarczyk & Mietzner, 2005, S. 112). Im Bereich der Bildanalyse hat der Kunsthistoriker Erwin Panofsky einen Ansatz zur Erschließung von Bildern als Quellen für historische Analysen entwickelt. Das von ihm entworfene dreistufige Interpretationsschema beginnt mit der vor-ikonographischen Analyse (Bildbeschreibung), der Erfassung des Bildmotivs: Es gilt beispielsweise zu erkennen, dass eine Person dargestellt ist und, in einem weiteren Schritt, dass es sich um eine bestimmte Person handelt. Die folgende ikonographische Analyse ermittelt das Thema eines Bildes, identifiziert Allegorien und Anekdoten, die dargestellt werden. Im dritten Schritt wird versucht, den historischen Dokumentensinn zu ermitteln, in dessen Rahmen historische Erkenntnisse in die Interpretation einfließen: Hier sind Fragen angebracht, warum und wie die Szene dargestellt wurde. Auf dieser Stufe wird das Bild als Ausdruck einer Mentalität, eines grundsätzlichen Verhaltens zur zeitgenössisch erfahrenen Realität sowie als bewusster oder unbewusster Kommentar zur gesellschaftlichen Realität gelesen (1997, S. 205−225).

2. Zum Begriff „Invektivität" und Überblick über die Geschichte medizinischer Fotografien, mit Berücksichtigung des kolonialen Afrikas

In den letzten Jahren hat sich mit dem Konzept der „Invektivität" eine neue Perspektive in den Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften etabliert.[3] Es begreift Phänomene der Kränkung und

[3]Sophia Michalsky, Theresa Haugk: Tagungsbericht: Invektive Gattungen. Formen und Medien der Herabsetzung. Interdisziplinäre Tagung des TPE „Sakralität und Sakrileg. Die Herabsetzung des Heiligen im interkonfessionellen Streit des 16. Jahrhunderts". 19.02.2020–21.02.2020. Dresden. In: *H-Soz-Kult* (23.04.2020). URL: https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8733 (Zugriff am 01. November 2021).

Erniedrigung, der Demütigung und Bloßstellung als - kultur- und epochenübergreifende - Grundoperationen sozialer Kommunikation. Ein kurzer Überblick über das Wortfeld der „Invektive" (lat. *invehere*, *invectivus*), das aus dem Lateinischen stammt und in allen europäischen Sprachen verbreitet ist: Herabsetzung, Schmähung, Schändung, Schmach, Beschämung, Bloßstellung, Verunglimpfung, Demütigung, Erniedrigung, Entwürdigung, Entehrung, Entheiligung, Entwertung. Mit dem Begriff „Invektivität" werden also verbale und nonverbale, schriftliche und mündliche, aber auch bildliche und mediale Aspekte von Kommunikation bezeichnet, durch die Personen oder Gruppen ausgegrenzt, herabgesetzt, stigmatisiert, gedemütigt, gekränkt oder lächerlich gemacht werden (Ellerbrock u.a, 2017, S. 2–24). Die Invektivität als wirkmächtiger Modus von Interaktions- und Kommunikationsprozessen ermöglicht ein genaueres Verständnis des Sozialen in seiner Konflikthaftigkeit. Invektive Praktiken adressieren Individuen oder Gruppen über ihre Körperlichkeit, z.B. durch sexistische, rassistische oder ableistische Narrative, und artikulieren damit Normvorstellungen und Machtansprüche, die den Adressierten einen Platz im sozialen Gefüge zuzuweisen suchen. Uwe Israel und Jürgen Müller äußern sich klarer:

> Mit invektiven Prozessen gehen Eskalationsdynamiken einher […]. Im Rahmen symbolischer Herabsetzung sind zumeist Tiervergleiche oder Semantiken von Reinheit, Furchtbarkeit und Gesundheit, mit denen Prozesse der Marginalisierung realisiert werden. Körperpolitik steht dabei nicht selten im Verbund mit Idealen und Normen, die den Grad von Abweichung überhaupt erfahrbar werden lassen. Körperideale definieren sich durch einen hohen Konformitätsdruck, der Prozesse von [Ekel] auslösen kann (2017, S. 17).

Ein prägnantes Beispiel der Invektivität bietet die Geschichte medizinischer Fotografie dar, die im 19. Jahrhundert im Zuge von Wissenschaft, Kolonialismus und Rassentheorien einen enormen Aufschwung nahm. Bereits Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts gingen einzelne psychiatrisch interessierte Ärzte, darunter Hugh W. Diamond und der französische Neurologe Jean-Martin Charcot, davon aus, dass die Fotografie einerseits eine gute Ergänzung zur Aktenführung sein könnte, andererseits aber auch als diagnostisches und therapeutisches Mittel eingesetzt werden könnte (Georges Didi-Huberman, 1997). Als Beginn der Fotografie von Kranken gelten gemeinhin die Aufnahmen Diamonds, des Direktors der Anstalt für psychisch Kranke in der Grafschaft Surrey in England, die er ab 1852 von Patientinnen anfertigte. Vornehmlich wurde indes versucht, die Psyche der Frau mittels der Kamera zu verbildlichen. Diente die Fotografie zunächst dazu, den individuellen Fall besser dokumentieren zu können, so wurde doch nach scheinbar typischen äußerlichen Symptomen bestimmter Krankheitsbilder gefahndet, die dann auch in Publikationen verbreitet wurden (Fox & Lawrence, 1988). Der Gebrauch der Fotografie ist in diesem Fall vor allem durch den hohen Glaubwürdigkeitsgrad des Mediums motiviert gewesen, der es erlaubte, vorhandene Vorstellungen von „Krankheiten" auf eine objektivierende Art zu visualisieren. Susane Regener nennt jene Fotografien, die zu medizinischen Zwecken entstanden, „Fotografien-Wider-Willen" denn sie wurden gegen den Willen bzw. ohne Einwilligung der betroffenen Person oder der Angehörigen unter direkter Gewaltanwendung oder indirekter Gewaltanwendung, d.h. durch beständige Überwachungs- Medikaliserungs- und verschiedene Therapiebedürfnisse hergestellt. Sie sind Dokumente einer Machtbeziehung: Diese besteht aus einem hypostasierten Leiden des Individuums. „Fotografien-Wider-Willen" orientieren sich an Erfassungsfotografien, wie sie bei kolonialistischen Forschungsprojekten weißer Forscher von den so genannten Wilden, Eingeborenen, *natives* hergestellt wurden (2013, S. 215). Im kolonialen Afrika nutzten Ärzte und Ethnologen Fotografien, um vermeintliche „körperliche Defizite" oder „rassische Merkmale" zu katalogisieren. Ein exemplarischer Fall hierfür ist das Wirken von Helene und Rudolf und Helene Oldenburg, die Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts in deutschen Kolonialgebieten tätig waren.

3. Sammlungsgeschichte von Fotografien im Dienste kolonialer Völkerkunde: der Fall von Rudolf und Helene Oldenburg

Zu den bedeutenden Kamerun-Sammlern im Dienste kolonialwissenschaftlicher Interessen des Wilhelminischen Deutschland zählen das Ehepaar Rudolf und Helene Oldenburg[4]. Der aus Österreich stammende Afrikareisende Rudolf Theodor Paul Oldenburg (1879−1932) arbeitete von 1901 bis 1906 als Faktoreileiter eines Bremer Handelshauses in Conakry, der Hauptstadt der damaligen Kolonie Französisch-Guinea (Guinea). Von 1907 bis 1913 hielt er sich mit seiner Frau Helene (geb. Aichinger) (1868–1922) in Kamerun auf, wo er als Geschäftsführer der Deutschen Kamerun-Gesellschaft in der damaligen Hauptstadt Douala tätig war.[5] Bereits 1902 begann er auf Anregung des Wiener Arztes und Völkerkundlers Rudolf Pöch mit dem Sammeln und Handeln von Ethnographica. Oldenburg unterstützte Pöch bei seinen „anthropometrischen Studien" und bei der Herstellung von Gipsmodellen lebender Modelle während seines Aufenthaltes in Kamerun. Oldenburgs Wunsch, Porträts von Vertretern verschiedener afrikanischer Kulturen anzufertigen, könnte durch die damals vorherrschenden Strömungen des Sozialdarwinismus angeregt worden sein. Auch wenn es seine Absicht war, „Menschentypen" zu dokumentieren, so weisen seine Arbeiten doch auch eine ausgeprägte künstlerische Qualität auf. Da zur Oldenburgs Zeit die Macht der Fotografie immer deutlicher wurde und um 1900 eine große Nachfrage nach Postkarten mit afrikanischen Szenen und Menschen entstand, erkannte er, dass die Abzüge, die er von seinen Fotografien anfertigte, eine Einnahmequelle sein konnten (von Lintig, 2018, 107). So vermarktete er Abzüge seiner Fotografien europaweit an verschiedene Museen, darunter das GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig, welches 1917 ein Konvolut von 419 Fotografien ankaufte. Einen weiteren Bestand besitzt das Weltmuseum Wien in Österreich mit 919 Motiven, verteilt auf 763 Glasnegative, 57 Glasdiapositive und 912 Abzüge in unterschiedlichen Formaten. 1932 wurde die Fotosammlung als Nachlass des verstorbenen Rudolf Oldenburg von seinem Bruder Fritz Oldenburg an das Weltmuseum Wien übergeben. Sowohl wissenschaftliche als auch kommerzielle Interessen spiegeln sich in Oldenburgs Fotografien wider. Entsprechend den wissenschaftlichen Vorgaben der damaligen Anthropologie stellte er „Typenbilder" und „Menschenbilder" her, die heute durchaus kritisch hinterfragt werden. Als sich Rudolf und Helene Oldenbourg in Kamerun aufhielten, wurde versucht, die Kolonie den Kolonialinteressenten insbesondere mit Hilfe von Fotografien bekannt zu machen. Die Relevanz von Oldenburgs und Tessmanns kolonialen Fotografien liegt in ihrer Fähigkeit, Vorstellungen von Pathologie und Zivilisation zu bestimmen, indem sie diese vermitteln. Wie dies konkret geschieht, wird weiterhin am Beispiel von Fotografien zu verschiedenen Krankheiten gezeigt. Zur Oldenburgs Zeit wurde die Macht der Fotografie immer offensichtlicher, und um 1900 entstand eine große Nachfrage nach Bildern aus Afrika. Die Fotografien der Oldenburgs sind allesamt zwischen 1901 und 1913 angefertigt worden, ein Zeitraum, der mit Rudolf Oldenburgs Aufenthalt in Afrika zusammenfällt.

[4]Andere ethnologische Expeditionen, die im Auftrag des deutschen Kaiserreichs nach Kamerun durchgeführt wurden, bleiben im Rahmen dieser Analyse unberücksichtigt. Dazu gehören die Expeditionen des Ethnologen Bernhard Ankermann 1910 in das Kameruner Grasland, des Geographen Franz Thorbecke, der mit seiner Frau Marie Pauline 1911-1913 die zweite Expedition der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft (DKG) zur Erforschung der Tikar- und Wute-Landschaften im Kameruner Grasland leitete. die Expedition des Herzogs Adolf Friedrich zu Mecklenburg (1873-1969) nach Zentralafrika in den Jahren 1910 und 1911. Auch Leo Frobenius, begleitet von seinem Zeichner Carl Arriens, reiste durch Kamerun, um Afrika zu erkunden.

[5] https://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_O/Oldenburg_1879-1932.xmt. (Zugriff am 24 November 2024).

4. Fotografie und Pathologie kolonisierter Subjekte: zur bildlichen Figuration des Leidens im ethnografisch kolonialen Kontext

Zur Legitimierung der kolonialen Machtausübung dienten die Fotografien außereuropäischer Völker. Rudolf Oldenburgs Fotografien entstanden vor dem Hintergrund eines afrikanischen Diskurses, der von stereotypen Vorstellungen geprägt war. Seine Aufnahmen waren dabei nicht die von typischen Händler*innen, sondern die von forschenden Fotograf*innen im Sinne der wissenschaftlichen Lehrmeinungen der damaligen Zeit. In den deutschsprachigen Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften dominierte die These des historischen Diffusionismus, wonach kulturelle Neuerungen immer nur an einem Ort „erfunden" und von dort aus verbreitet wurden. Die Ursache kultureller Gemeinsamkeiten wurde somit auf den Kulturkontakten zurückgeführt. Von der Auseinandersetzung mit den Kulturen Afrikas erwartete man daher Erkenntnisse über die Ursprünge und die Entwicklung der Menschheit. Nach dieser Auffassung waren Europäer an der Spitze der Evolutionsgeschichte, während die meisten afrikanischen Völker an den Anfang gerückt wurden. Die Fotografie wurde als ideales Mittel für die Dokumentation solcher Studien betrachtet. Die einführenden Ausführungen Rudolf Pöchs zu seinem Vortrag „Das Photographieren auf anthropologischen Forschungsreisen" sind hierfür aufschlussreich:

> Ein wichtiger Zweig der Anthropologie, worunter wir im Allgemeinen die naturwissenschaftliche Betrachtung und Erforschung des Menschen verstehen wollen, ist die Erforschung der primitiven Völker, das heißt jener Völker, die auf einer tieferen Stufe der Entwicklung und Kultur stehen geblieben sind, die wir mit einem anderen Worte auch Naturvölker oder Wildvölker, oder kurz ‚Wilde' nennen. Wir erhalten aus dem Studium dieser Völker wichtige Aufschlüsse über die Frage der Herkunft des Menschengeschlechtes überhaupt und über die Fragen nach der Entstehung der Kultur. Wir dürfen nicht hoffen, solche niedrig stehende Völker mitten unter oder gleich neben den zivilisierten Rassen zu finden; dort sind sie im Kampfe ums Dasein, der höheren Kultur weichend, untergegangen, erhalten konnten sie sich nur in sehr weit vom Weltverkehre abgelegenen Gegenden (1910, S.107).

Fotos, die den Schmerz erfahren entsprechen der „Ästhetik des Leidens" in Anlehnung an die Kulturtheoretikerin Susan Sonntag (2005). Elizabeth Dauphinée fasst ebenso das Bild als entscheidendes Medium auf, um den Schmerz anderer zu verstehen:

> Images of the body in pain are the primary medium through which we come to know war, torture and other pain producing activities […] The experience of the body in pain is a phenomenon that mainly defies attempts at visual representation. Beyond the obvious claim that an image can never unproblematically represent the complexity of a lived reality, the visceral experience of pain both animates and confounds attempts to 'make sense' of pain within the logic of a culture and a politics that rely for their ethical bearings on the verifiability associated with the visible (2007, S. 139).

In Anlehnung an die Arbeiten von John Tagg und Allan Sekula haben Historiker die zersetzende Funktion der Fotografie bei der Vermessung, Überwachung, Klassifizierung und Kontrolle derjenigen hervorgehoben, die in ihren Fokus gerieten. Aus diesem Grund liegt der Schwerpunkt auf Bildern, die in Krankenhäusern, Kasernen, Zuchthäusern, Irrenanstalten und städtischen Slums aufgenommen wurden. Selbst die Porträtmalerei war nicht wertfrei, denn Anthropologen, Ethnologen und Rassenkundler bedienten sich der Bilder von Armen, Habenichtsen, Kranken, Kriminellen und Andersartigen, um die immer weiter verbreiteten Vorstellungen von Gesundheit und Reinheit, Krankheit und Minderwertigkeit zu untermauern (Tagg, 1988; Sekula, 1984). Sowohl die Macht als auch das Vergnügen der Kamera lagen in den Händen der Bildproduzenten. Der deutsche Kolonialismus in Afrika fällt mit der Blütezeit wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen zusammen, nämlich der Ethnologie sowie der Anthropologie, die sich u.a. dem afrikanischen Körper widmeten. Die hier zu untersuchenden Fotografien verbinden ethnografische und medizinische Dokumentation und ist im Kontext der frühen fotografischen Erfassung afrikanischer Völker und ihrer Lebensbedingungen zu verstehen. Die Fotografien fungieren somit als polysemantische Dokumente d.h. als medizinhistorische Quelle, koloniales

Machtdokument und Zeugnis indigener Krankheitsbewältigung. Die Bildunterschriften heben explizit die medizinischen Merkmale hervor, was die Reduktion der Abgebildeten auf ihre Krankheiten und ihre Funktionen als „ethnografische Exemplare" unterstreicht.

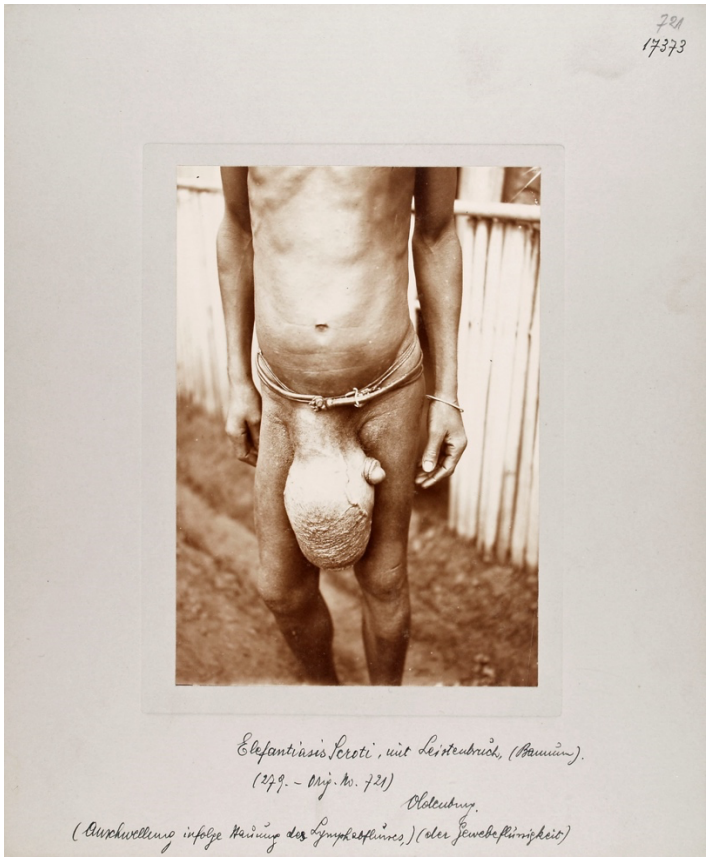

Abb. 2: Weltmuseum Wien, Fotograf/in: Rudolf Oldenburg, Fotograf/in: Helene Oldenburg, Inventarnummer VF_17373, Elefantiasis Scroti mit Leistenbruch; Bamum (Anschwellung infolge Stauung des Lymphabflusses), 1904.

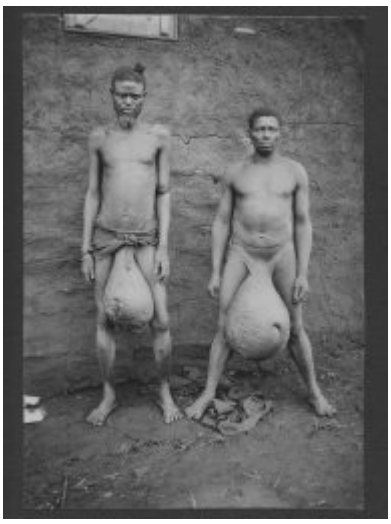

Abb. 3: GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Fotograf: Rudolf Oldenburg, Inventarnummer PhMAf 2433, Zwei Männer, an einer Elefantiasis der Hoden, Bamum (Region), 1907–1913.

Bei den Bildern 2 und 3 handelt es sich um Fotografien von Personen, Männern, die an der gleichen Krankheit leiden, nämlich an Elephantiasis. Die zweite Abbildung zeigt einen

männlichen Patienten der Bamum-Volksgruppe, der an Skrotalelefantiasis leidet und von einem sichtbaren Leistenbruch begleitet. Die Deformation resultiert aus einer anhaltenden Stauung des Lymphabflusses, vermutlich infolge einer chronischen filariatischen Infektion. Der Körper ist in Frontalansicht positioniert und der Blick ist unsichtbar. Die extreme Schwellung des Genitalbereichs dominiert die Bildkomposition. Die Aufnahme legt Wert auf die Präsentation der pathologischen Veränderung des Körpers bei gleichzeitiger Anonymisierung und Entdividualisierung der abgebildeten Person. Der Bildhintergrund ist nicht gut zu erkennen. Es handelt sich vermutlich um einen Bambuszaun. Inszenierung deutet dabei auf eine ethnografische Kontextualisierung hin. Als Material und Technik im dritten Foto (Abb.3) wird Silbergelatine verwendet, das gebräuchlichste Verfahren, um Schwarz-Weiß-Abzüge herzustellen. Die Kranken auf dem Bild 3 lassen sich vor einer Mauer abbilden, offensichtlich einer Mauer aus Lehm. Die unbekleideten abgebildeten Personen stehen nebeneinander. Der Fotograf wendet hier Darstellungsformen an, wie sie von den WissenschaftlerInnen in diesen Jahren für die anthropometrische Fotografie gefordert wurden. Die Bilder sind frontal aufgenommen und die Männer gerade so, dass ihre Körper noch vollständig sichtbar sind. Die pathologischen Veränderungen sind bewusst exponiert und rücken als Hauptmotiv in den Vordergrund. Die Fotografie ist sachlich und scheinbar dokumentarisch inszeniert, zugleich erzeugt sie durch die Pose der Männer, regungslos, dem Blick des Fotografen ausgesetzt, eine Ästhetik der Ausstellung und Objektivierung. Der Hintergrund bleibt unscharf und undifferenziert, was die Konzentration auf die Körper der Männer und ihre Deformationen zusätzlich verstärkt. Das Bild operiert mit einem visuellen Code der Abweichung und Normverletzung, der die dargestellten Subjekte primär als Träger medizinischer Anomalien erscheinen lässt. Kranke Körper werden zu Beweisstücken gemacht und als Orte eines doppelten Syndroms betrachtet: als Zeichen körperlicher Störung, Erregung und Differenz sowie als Zeichen sozialer Ablehnung und Abweichung. Mit Krankenfotos werden unterschiedliche Aspekte des Invektiven aufgerufen: Einerseits Herabsetzung etwa durch Hervorhebungen bestimmter Körpermerkmale bzw. Körpererscheinungen, andererseits körperliche Reaktionen, die mit einer erfahrenen Demütigung einhergehen können.

Abb. 4: Weltmuseum Wien, Fotograf/in: Rudolf Oldenburg, Fotograf/in: Helene Oldenburg, Inventarnummer VF_17374, Bamum-Weib mit Struma (Kropf), 1904.

Die Bildbeschriftung „Bamum-Weib mit Struma (Kropf)" (Abb. 4) reduziert die dargestellte Person auf Ethnie, Geschlecht und Pathologie. Auf dem Foto ist eine Frau abgebildet, die in der Bildmitte steht. Ihr Blick ist von der Kamera abgewandt. Ihr Oberkörper ist unbekleidet, um eine deutliche Vergrößerung im Bereich des Halses sichtbar zu machen. Für die Abbildung der Körper von Afrikanern und Afrikanerinnen wurden bestimmte Genres und Aufnahmemodi, wie der ethnografische Stil. Natürlich hat dieses Genre durch bestimmte Inszenierungen des menschlichen Körpers die Interpretation des Bildinhalts beeinflusst und teilweise auch manipuliert. In den Darstellungen wurde häufig der Körper in den Vordergrund gerückt, wobei bestimmte körperliche Aspekte zum Teil explizit durch ästhetische Inszenierungen hervorgehoben wurden. Sogenannte „Krankenfotografien" lenken den Fokus nicht nur gezielt auf den Körper, sondern suggerieren auch, dass die abgebildeten Menschen anhand physischer Charakteristika objektiv und erkenntnisbringend geordnet werden können. Die Betonnung körperlicher Merkmale wird als Zeichen kulturell, sozial oder gesundheitlich bedingter „Mängel" gedeutet.

Abb. 5: GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Fotograf: Rudolf Oldenburg, Inventarnummer PhMAf 2089, Porträt einer Person der Bamum, an einem Nabelbruch leidend, Bamum (Region), 1907–1913.

Das Foto 5, dessen Bildmaterial und Technik Papierpositive in Schwarz-Weiß sind, konzentriert sich die anthropologische Dokumentation einer Person mit medizinischer Besonderheit, dem Nabelbruch[6]. Deutlich erkennbar ist die charakteristische Vorwölbung im Nabelbereich, die auf eine Nabelhernie hindeutet. Diese Vorwölbung erscheint als rundliche Erhebung, die sich von der umgebenden Bauchdecke abhebt. Der abgebildete Nabelbruch stellt eine medizinische Besonderheit dar, bei der Teile des Darms oder Gewebe durch eine Schwachstelle im Bauchwand im Bereich des Nabels hervortreten. Der Bildinhalt wird durch Begleittext und bildliche Darstellung vermittelt. Bilder begleiten somit und formen die Prozesse der Wissens- und Wahrheitsbildung mit. Die Bamum-Weib ist in einer aufrechten, starren Haltung. Sie hält einen

[6]In einem Aufsatz zum Titel „Über die Verbreitung des Nabelbruches in Afrika und seine plastische Darstellung in der Eingeborenenkunst" legt Robert Routil zur Untermauerung der von Ploss-Bartels aufgestellten These von den zahlreichen Nabelbrüchen bei „Negriden", eine Übersicht über die anhand von Fotografien festgestellten Nabelbrüche vor. Daraus geht hervor, dass bei den Bantu im inneren Waldland bei beiden Geschlechtern schwere Nabelbrüche mangels adäquater Behandlung außergewöhnlich häufig sind, während sie im Kameruner Grasland, im Bamumkönigreich seltener auftreten. Robert Routil: Über die Verbreitung des Nabelbruches in Afrika und seine plastische Darstellung in der Eingeborenenkunst.

Spazierstock in ihrer linken Hand. Vor ihr ist ein Korb aus Ranken zu sehen, in dem sich Gegenstände befinden. Im Hintergrund des Bildes sind Blätter entlang eines Weges zu sehen, bei dem es sich um einen Fußpfad zu handeln scheint. Die Position des fotografierten Objekts wechselt zwischen frontaler und seitlicher Aufnahme. Die nackten Füße, die auf der Oberfläche des Bodens ruhen, unterstreichen den dokumentarischen Charakter des Bildes. Natürliches Licht und Blitzlicht heben die Körperkonturen und die betroffene Stelle hervor. Es entsteht ein fast klinischer Eindruck. Über eine bloße Körperfotografie hinaus versammelt diese Aufnahme die Klassifizierung aller Menschenbilder, wie sie Bernard Marbot und André Rouillé entworfen haben, nämlich Körper als Subjekt, Körper als Objekt und Körper als Element (1986).[7]

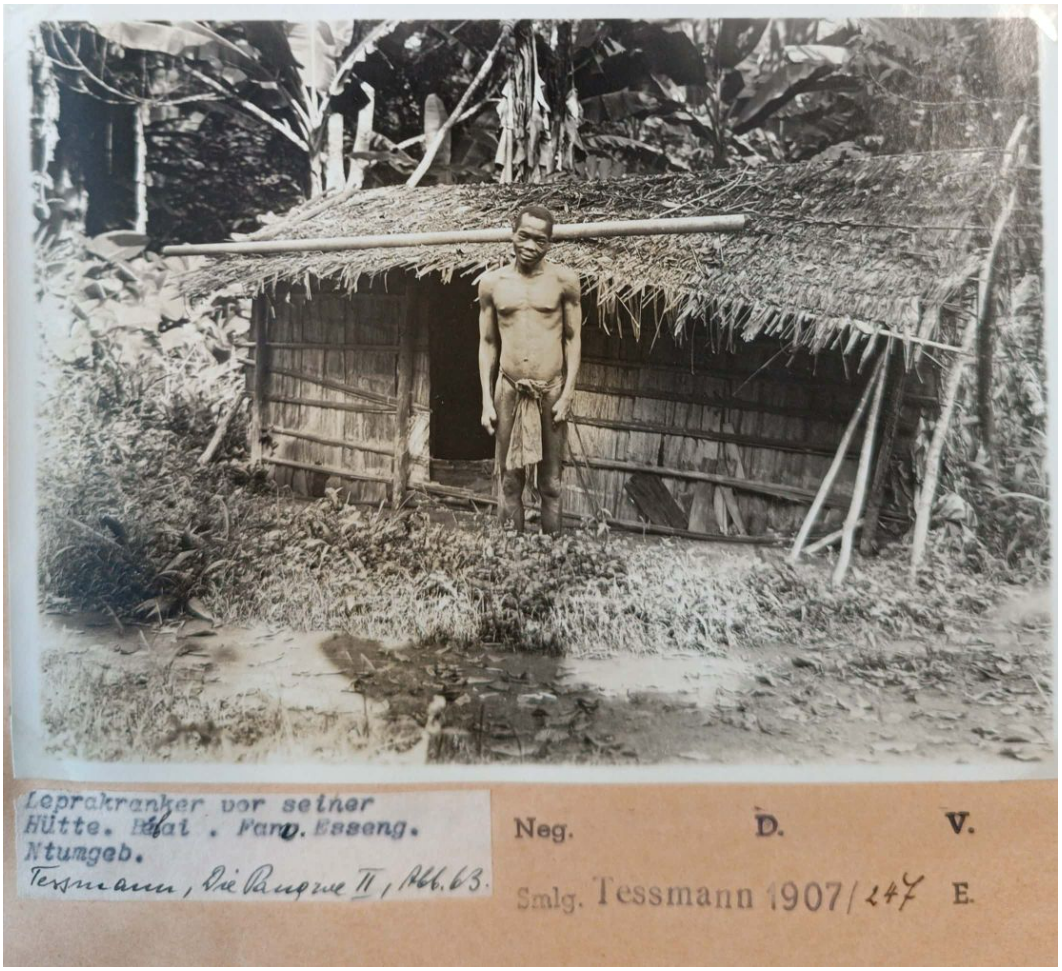

Abb. 6: Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, Archiv für regionale Geographie, Leipzig, Sammlung von Günter Tessmann, Inventarnummer 247, Leprakranker vor seiner Hütte, Bebai. Fang. Esseng. Ntumgebiet 1907.

Die vorliegende Fotografie aus dem Jahre 1907 zeigt einen Leprakranken der Fang-Ethnie vor seiner Hütte im Dorf Bebai, nahe Esseng im Ntumgebiet. Das Ntumgebiet im südlichen

[7] Unter der ersten Kategorie fallen vornehmlich Porträts. Zentral hier ist das Individuum an sich oder als Teil einer sozialen Gruppe. Körper als Objekte dagegen werden meist nicht aus Interesse für das Individuum aufgenommen, sondern, wie in der anthropologischen, oder medizinischen Fotografie, zum Zweck wissenschaftlicher Projekte, Befriedigung von Neugier oder Lust sowie möglicher Kontrolle. In der Kategorie „Körper als Element" ist der Körper an sich nur nebensächlich. Er dient bei diesen Aufnahmen als Maßstab, materielles Objekt oder künstlerisches Mittel.

Kamerun, nahe der Grenze zu Äquatorialguinea und Gabun, bildete 1907 einen Schauplatz deutscher Kolonialforschung. Bebai erscheint in Expeditionsberichten als Siedlung südlich von Ebolowa, eingebettet in tropischen Sekundärwald mit locker verstreuten Gehöften. Essen, als Nachbarort, markierte die Schnittstelle zwischen Fang-Dörfern und Baka-Pygmäen- Siedlungen. Das Bild dokumentiert nicht nur individuelle Leiden, sondern spiegelt koloniale Erfassungspraktiken, architektonische Traditionen und sozialmedizinische Realitäten in Westzentralafrika wider. Die Aufnahme entstand im Kontext der „Lübecker-Pangwe-Expedition." Die maßgeblich in Lübeck geplante und finanzierte zweijährige ethnographische Mission (1907−1909) sollte eine frühe Form stationärer ethnographischer Feldforschung im Süden Kameruns und im Hinterland des heutigen Äquatorialguineas bei den Pangwe[8], heute Fang, durchführen. Tessmanns Expedition war ein großer Erfolg, denn nicht nur zahlreiche botanische und zoologische Präparate, sondern auch mehr als 1.200 ethnologische Objekte aus Zentralafrika gelangten nach Lübeck und Berlin. Viele dieser Objekte wurden 1942 zerstört. Die erworbenen Objekte bildeten in Umfang und Vielfalt die damals weltweit größte Sammlung von Fangobjekten. Dokumente, Tonaufnahmen, Karten, Fotografien und ethnographische Objekte, die gesammelt, zusammengetragen und analysiert wurden, haben es ermöglicht, wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse über die „Pangwe" und ihren Lebensraum zu Beginn der europäischen Zivilisation zu gewinnen. Das Archiv für regionale Geographie am Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde in Leipzig beherbergt einen umfangreichen Bestand dieser Bildsammlung. Der Man im Vordergrund zeigt typische Leprasymptome: knotige Hautverdickungen an Händen und Gesicht sowie eine Kontraktur der Finger, die auf eine Nervenschädigung hinweist. Die Schnittwunden an den Finger deuten auf Gelenkzerstörungen hin, wie sie bei der unbehandelten Lepra auftreten. Der Abgebildete posiert vor seiner abgelegenen, leicht schiefen Hütte, der einer klassischen Fang-Bauweise folgt. Sowohl das Dach als auch die Wände der Hütte sind aus Bast gefertigt, wobei auf dem Dach eine Stange aus Bambus liegt. Weitere Bambusstangen sind zwischen die Wände gesteckt, dienen aber auch als Pfosten, um die Hütte zu stützen und zu verhindern, dass sie einstürzen kann. Der Hintergrund des Fotos zeigt Sträucher und Grasbüschel vor und um die Hütte. Der Mann mit Haaren, einem nackten Oberkörper, sowie einem Tuch um die Lenden, das sein Geschlechtsteil verdeckt, ist in fröhlicher Haltung dargestellt. Lepra galt in der Fang-Kosmologie nicht als biomedizinische Erkrankung, sondern als Manifestation sozialer Disharmonie. Betroffene wurden in abgelegene Hütten verbannt, durften jedoch am spirituellen Leben teilhaben. Deutsche Missionsärzte begannen 1904 mit der Einrichtung von Leprakolonien, stießen jedoch auf Widerstand bei der Fangbevölkerung, die Isolation als Verstoß gegen Ahnenverehrung interpretierte. Die Fotografie entstand vermutlich im Rahmen medizinethnologischer Studien zur Legitimation quarantänepolitischer Maßnahmen. Das Krankheitsbild des Betroffenen macht ihn zum Behinderten und führt zu seiner Ausgrenzung an den Rand der Gesellschaft.[9] Behinderung wird mit Krankheit gleichgesetzt und bildlich vermittelt (Ochsner & Grebe, 2023). Aus der Perspektive der „Disability Studies" können, so Anne Waldschmidt, neue Erkenntnisse gewonnen werden, über:

[8]Der Name „Pangwe" wurde zum ersten Mal im Jahre 1819 von T. E. Bowdich in seinem Buch „Mission from Cape Coast Castle Ashantee" Appendice, - London - erwähnt, allerdings nur vom Hörensagen. Der erste Weiße, der sie tatsächlich sah, war der berühmte Reisende und Abenteurer Paul B. du Chaillu, der sie 1861 in seinem Buch „Explorations and adventures in Equatorial Africa", London, im heutigen Spanien, einige Tagesreisen von der Küste entfernt, fand.

[9]Als Randgruppen werden in Anlehnung an Rüdiger Peuckert jene Gruppen der Bevölkerung bezeichnet, die sich in ihren Werten, Normen, ihrem Verhalten und/oder ihrem äußeren Erscheinungsbild von der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung unterscheiden. Analysiert werden unter diesem Begriff u.a: Zigeuner, psychisch Kranke, körperlich Behinderte, Homosexuelle, Prostituierte, Drogenabhängige, Alkoholiker, Obdachlose und Nichtsesshafte.

> Die Art und Weise, wie kulturelles Wissen über die Körperlichkeit produziert wird, wie Normalitäten und Abweichungen konstruiert werden, wie Differenzierungskategorien entlang körperlicher Merkmale etabliert werden, wie gesellschaftliche Praktiken der Ein- und Ausschließung gestaltet sind, wie personale und soziale Identität geformt und neue Körperbilder und Subjektbegriffe geschaffen werden (2003, S. 16).

Behinderung wird nicht als Eigenschaft von Menschen und Körpern verstanden, sondern als Kategorisierungszugehörigkeit, in die kranke Körper eingeordnet werden. Indem die Abbildungen häufig eine Ikonografie aufweisen, die auf dichotomen Zuschreibungen wie zum Beispiel Täter/Opfer oder Hilfsbedürftigkeit/Helfender basiert, laden sie im Kontext des Kolonialismus tendenziell zu essentialistischen Interpretation und impliziten Wertungen nämlich krank/gesund; hübsch/hässlich usw. ein.

5. Fazit

Die Analyse kolonialer Fotografien von Kranken aus dem kolonialen Kamerun verdeutlicht, dass diese Bilder ambivalent zwischen der Darstellung humanitärer Hilfsbedürftigkeit und der Invektivität gegenüber pathologisierter Körper oszillieren. Während sie auf den ersten Blick Mitleid und den Anspruch auf medizinische Hilfeleistung suggerieren, reproduzieren sie zugleich koloniale Machtstrukturen, indem sie die Abgebildeten als defizitäre, vom europäischen Blick zu bewertende „Objekte" inszenieren. In ihrer fotografischen Ästhetik verbinden sich visuelle Strategien der Mitleidserzeugung mit Mechanismen sozialer Abwertung, sodass die Fotografien weniger die individuellen Biografien der Abgebildeten dokumentieren als vielmehr koloniale Macht- und Wissensordnungen visuell verankern. Dass ein fotografisches Motiv kein Zufallsprodukt ist, sondern ein bewusster Verweis auf eine Situation, eine Person oder einen Gegenstand, zeigt die Auseinandersetzung mit Fotografien aus den hier untersuchten Sammlungen. Der französische Fototheoretiker Roland Barthes hatte bereits auf diesen Umstand hingewiesen: „Die Photographie ist immer nur ein Wechselgesang von Rufen wie „Seht mal! Schau! Hier ist´s sie deutet mit dem Finger auf ein bestimmtes Gegenüber und ist an diese reine Hinweissprache gebunden" (2012, S. 13). Spuren dieser Auffassung, mit einer Fotografie auch ein Stück Realität nach Hause tragen zu können, finden sich ebenfalls in den verschiedenen Bezeichnungen, die man der Fotografie und dem Fotografieren im 19. Jahrhundert gab: da ist zunächst der Begriff des Typus, der im Wort Daguerreotypie enthalten ist. Dokumentarische und Wertende Elemente sind in den Krankenfotografien der Kolonialzeit oft vermischt. Solche Fotografien wurden häufig im Rahmen kolonialer Wissenschaften aufgenommen, um die vermeintliche „Andersartigkeit" oder gar „Minderwertigkeit" der kolonisierten Bevölkerungen zu betonen und damit koloniale Herrschaftsideologien zu untermauern. Diese Fotografien waren nicht neutral, sondern durch koloniale Wahrnehmungen geprägt, die Menschen in Krankheitsbedingten, benachteiligten Zuständen abbildete. Fotografien von kranken Körpern sind gleichzeitig „humanitäre Bildpraktiken" d.h. spezifische Handhabungen und Verwendungsweisen von Bildern, mit dem übergeordneten Ziel der Genese von Unterstützung zur Linderung von menschlicher Not und Bedürftigkeit (Stornig, 2018, S. 331). Humanitäre Bilder gaben dem menschlichen Leid Form und Bedeutung und machten es für das europäische Publikum nachvollziehbar, dringlich und realisierbar. Diese fotografischen „Beweise" waren notwendig für die Interpretation. Sie lenkten die Aufmerksamkeit der Betrachter durch spezifische Narrative. Die hier diskutierten Fotografien sind allesamt rassistisch, diskriminierend und eine Verletzung der Persönlichkeit der Abgebildeten. Sie sind in einigen Fällen als „Bild-Raub", als „geraubte Schatten" zu verstehen. Mit dem fotografischen Material aus dem kolonialen Kamerun zum Thema Krankheit werden Fragen allgemeiner ethischer Natur (Menschenwürde) sowie des Opferschutzes und der Persönlichkeitsrechte aufgeworfen.

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Pädagogische Übersetzung mit Künstlicher Intelligenz im DaF-Studium

Ayşe Uyanık[1]

Abstract

Dieser Forschungsartikel untersucht die Rolle der pädagogischen Übersetzung mit Hilfe der künstlichen Intelligenz im Übersetzungsunterricht. Die pädagogische Übersetzung spielt im Deutsch-als-Fremdsprache-Unterricht eine bedeutende didaktische Rolle. Durch das Übersetzen können syntaktische, semantische und lexikalische Kompetenzen geübt und zur Ausbildung im Sprachpaar Deutsch-Türkisch beigetragen werden. Ihre Funktion als Lernmethode und Hilfsmittel zur Förderung der Sprachfertigkeiten ist unumstritten. Im digitalen Zeitalter unterzieht sich die Übersetzung als Medium einen technologischen Wandel. Künstliche-Intelligenz-basierte Übersetzungsprogramme wie ChatGPT, DeepL und Google Translate haben zunehmend die Rolle von Wörterbüchern und Grammatiken im Übersetzungsunterricht übernommen. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, anhand unterschiedlicher Übersetzungsaufgaben, sowohl aus Gebrauchstexten als auch aus literarischen Texten, die Vor- und Nachteile dieser KI-Tools im Deutsch-Türkischen Übersetzungsunterricht zu analysieren. Durch die Integration dieser neuen Technologien sollen die Sprachkompetenzen der Deutschlernenden gefördert und alternative Lernmöglichkeiten angeboten werden. Mit dem Einsatz der KI-basierten Übersetzungsprogramme wird angestrebt, den Genauigkeitsgrad der Ergebnisse zu vergleichen, den Wortschatz zu erweitern und durch kontrastive Gegenüberstellungen grammatischer Strukturen die semantischen und syntaktischen Fähigkeiten der Lernenden weiterzuentwickeln. Darüber hinaus wird aufgezeigt, wie Lehrkräfte, indem sie die neuen Technologien ebenso gut wie digitale Natives beherrschen, ihre alltägliche Arbeit erleichtern und bereichern können.

Schlüsselwörter: *Übersetzung im Daf – Unterricht, pädagogische Übersetzung, Künstliche Intelligenz, digitale natives, Übersetzungsprogramme*

Abstract

This research article examines the role of pedagogical translation with the help of artificial intelligence in translation lessons. Pedagogical translation plays an important didactic role in German as a foreign language lessons. Through translation, syntactic, semantic and lexical skills can be practiced and contribute to training in the German-Turkish language pair. Its function as a learning method and tool for promoting language skills is undisputed. In the digital age, translation as a medium is undergoing a technological transformation. Artificial intelligence-based translation programmers such as ChatGPT, DeepL and Google Translate have increasingly taken over the role of dictionaries and grammars in translation lessons. The aim of this thesis is to analyses the advantages and disadvantages of these AI tools in German-Turkish translation lessons using different translation tasks from both everyday texts and literary

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texts. By integrating these new technologies, the language skills of German learners are to be promoted and alternative learning opportunities offered. By using these AI-based translation programmes, the aim is to compare the degree of accuracy of the results, expand vocabulary and further develop learners' semantic and syntactic skills through contrastive comparisons of grammatical structures. It also shows how teachers, by mastering these new technologies as well as digital natives, can facilitate and enrich their everyday work.

Keywords: *translation in GFL lessons, pedagogical translation, artificial intelligence, digital natives, translation programmers*

Extended Abstract

Pedagogical translation with artificial intelligence in GFL studies

In this thesis, the contribution of pedagogical translation in German as a foreign language teaching with the support of artificial intelligence was investigated. It was found that translation is not only a simple activity in the study of German as a foreign language, but also a learning method for the further development of language skills. Through translation exercises, talents such as vocabulary and grammar can be trained and contribute to the language competence of the learner. It serves to show the differences and similarities between the languages or to familiarize learners with the equivalents of words in these languages. Or, 'as a form of practice in language lessons or to test what has been learnt (Nord, 2002)'. Because this form of practice is aimed at language education, it is called pedagogical translation. Traditionally, translation tasks are carried out using bilingual dictionaries. With the digital revolution and modern AI-powered translation tools such as ChatGPT, DeepL and Google Translate, access to translation resources has changed fundamentally. These technologies offer not only word and sentence translations, but also the processing of entire texts, which creates new didactic opportunities and challenges. The integration of such tools in the classroom raises questions about the role of teachers and their digital competence, especially given the discrepancy between the 'digital natives' (learners) and the 'digital immigrants' (teachers).

The aim of the study was to analyses the advantages and disadvantages of these technologies in German-Turkish translation lessons. In doing so, the accuracy of the translation results, the enrichment of vocabulary and the promotion of grammatical skills were evaluated. It also analyzed how teachers can effectively use these technologies to facilitate their work and increase learners' language competence. The research aimed to identify alternative learning methods that enable the symbiotic use of modern technologies and proven didactic principles to ensure sustainable language education in the digital age.

The paper highlighted the important role of the digital transformation in translation teaching and explored the use of AI-based translation programmers such as ChatGPT, DeepL and Google Translate. The results of these three AI tools were compared with sample translations of commercial and literary texts and their authenticity checked. In addition, an attempt was made to determine the extent to which they take over the everyday work of teachers.

The comparisons of the translations showed that the use of AI-based translation programs can have both advantages and disadvantages. Whilst they support the learning of vocabulary and serve as a very fast and practical dictionary, in some cases the transfer of meaning alone is not enough. These automatic translations offer teachers and learners the development of sentence structures and creative ideas for other alternatives, but there are often mistranslations in syntax and/or semantics. World knowledge, cultural knowledge

and general knowledge are often a necessity. If texts from everyday politics are also based on solid information, they promote knowledge of national politics, regional studies and history. The teacher/learner needs a critical awareness of the other language.

The digital translation programmers ChatGPT, DeepL and Google Translate, translate everyday texts that identify knowledge and denotative meanings more accurately than literary texts. Stylistic subtleties, idiomatic expressions, form and content in aesthetic texts are neglected. The effect on the reader that comes from figurative language is also no longer felt. All these differences can be demonstrated to learners in translation lessons and examples can be used to show them what to look out for in digital translations. By analyzing errors in the exercises, the correct word selection, syntactic order and semantic equivalence can be determined in both languages.

Once again, the use of these AI tools in translation lessons offers an interactive and practical approach. During the lesson, the learners use their mobile phones, tablets or computers in a lesson-oriented way. The teacher also gains time and energy by keeping the learners busy with current tasks. However, from the learners' point of view, there is a risk that they will rely too much on these tools and develop their own language skills less actively.

Future research could focus on how these tools can be used in an even more targeted way for specific learning objectives and how they can be used to improve language skills.

Einleitung

Übersetzung wird im Rahmen des Deutsch als Fremdsprache Studiums (DaF – Studium) als Lehrfach unterrichtet. Es wird nicht wie bei der Translationswissenschaften das professionelle Übersetzen und Dolmetschen abgezielt, sondern das pädagogische. Hier ist Übersetzen nicht das Unterrichtsziel, sondern Lehrmittel, dass als Methode den Lernenden um ihre Sprachkenntnisse zu verbessern, hilft. Sie dient dazu die Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten der Sprachen aufzuzeigen oder die Lernenden mit den Äquivalenten der Wörter in diesen Sprachen vertraut zu machen. Beziehungsweise, „als eine Form der Übung im Sprachunterricht oder zur Überprüfung des Gelernten (Nord, 2002)". Alle Übersetzungsaktivitäten, die im Unterricht durchgeführt werden, um den Wortschatz der anderen Sprache zu verbessern, den Transfer grammatikalischer Strukturen zu erleichtern oder ein vergleichbares Merkmal dieser Sprachen hervorzuheben, werden als „pädagogische Übersetzung" definiert, da sie auf die Sprachausbildung abzielen. Pädagogische Übersetzung kann kurz als „Übersetzungsübungen für didaktische Zwecke" definiert werden (Ergun, 2012).

Diese Didaktik folgt öfters durch das Verlangen einer Übersetzung von einem Satz oder Text. Die Übersetzungsaufgabe wird den Lernenden übermittelt und eine persönliche Übersetzung, höchstens durch Hilfe eines zweisprachigen Wörterbuches, erwartet. Durch diese Bemühungen sollen sie ihre Sprachkenntnisse weiterbilden. Doch die „digitale Revolution", die eine weltweite Vernetzung mithilfe von Computer und Internet anbietet, hat längst die Klassenzimmer erobert. Zugang zu globalen Bildungsressourcen war noch nie so schnell wie heute. Mit Hilfe von vielen Übersetzungsprogrammen kann man in Sekunden ein digitales Wörterbuch erreichen. Ohne Fremdsprachenkenntnisse, ohne ein zweisprachiges Wörterbuch ein Wort, einen ganzen Satz so wie einen Text oder sogar ein Gespräch übersetzen. Wie weit können sich die Fremdsprachenlerner, die diese neueste Technologie in der Tasche tragen, fernhalten? Mit jedem Fortschritt der künstlichen Intelligenz (KI) diskutiert die Bildungsgemeinschaft, inwieweit Übersetzungsprogramme den Fremdsprachenunterricht beeinflussen wird. Ob in Zukunft Fremdsprachen gelernt/ gelehrt werden? Oder wie weit die KI die Arbeit des Übersetzens / Übersetzers übernimmt. Doch wie bereit sind wir auf diesen Umbruch?

Das Für und Wider der neuen Technologien ist nicht der jüngste gesellschaftliche Diskurs der Menschheitsgeschichte. Schon im Mittelalter argumentierte man, dass Technik und Bildung die Prioritäten der jüngeren Generation verändern. Wie soll die neue Generation, auch oft „digitale natives" (Prensky, 2001) genannt, lernen? Oder sollte die Frage „wie erfahren ist die Bildungsgemeinschaft in dieser digitalen Welt? Wie kann sie ihren Nachwuchs auf die digitale Zukunft vorbereiten?" heißen. Prensky meint, dass die heutigen Lernenden Muttersprachler der digitalen Sprache (…), dem Internet, sind und haltet die vorherige Generation für „digitale Einwanderer". Er schätzt, dass „[a]lle Älteren (…) mit einem Fuß in der Vergangenheit stehen (Prensky, 2001)".

„Digitale Natives", die mit dieser neuen Technologie durchgehend interagieren und anders als ihre Vorgänger denken, sind in die digitale Umgebung eingeboren und ihre Aneignung an die vorhandene Technik ist für sie ein Kinderspiel. Hingegen fällt der Lehrkraft das Schritthalten mit ihnen, schwer. Doch „Lernen ist ein sozialer Prozess und kommt daher nicht ohne Kommunikation und Feedback zwischen Lernenden und Lehrenden und auch nicht ohne Kontakt zwischen den Lernenden aus. Diese Interaktion kann heute sehr effektiv durch die modernen Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien (IKT) in Unabhängigkeit von Raum und Zeit, synchron und asynchron unterstützt werden (Zawacki-Richter, 2013)". Aber die digitale Lücke zwischen den Lehrenden und

Lernenden erschwert es, denn die Lehrkräfte sind entweder dem digitalen Zeitalter fremd, oder sie haben keine Übereinstimmung für den Beitrag der digitalen Tools im Übersetzungsunterricht. Es kommt auch oft vor, dass die Lehrkraft die bis heute ausgeübten Lehrmethoden nicht ändern möchte. Doch der Einsatz dieser neuen Technologien im Unterricht ist im heutigen Werdegang, für die digitale Kommunikation, zwangsläufig. Anstatt zweisprachige Wörterbücher sind zukünftig Künstliche Intelligenz (KI) basierte Übersetzungsprogramme, wie ChatGPT, DeepL und Google Translate (GT) in Anwendung. Sie übersetzen nicht nur Wörter oder Sätze, sondern gesamte Dokumente, Texte, Bücher usw.

Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es demnach mit unterschiedlichen Übersetzungsaufgaben, aus Gebrauchs – und literarischen Texten den Vor- und Nachteilen dieser KI-Tools im Übersetzungsunterricht Deutsch/Türkisch einzeln nachzugehen. Durch die Integration der modernen Technologien die Sprachkompetenz der Deutschlerner ausbilden und alternative Lernmöglichkeiten anbieten. Anhand solcher KI basierten Übersetzungsprogramme soll der Genauigkeitsgrad der Ergebnisse verglichen und somit der Wortschatz bereichert werden. Darüber hinaus soll mittels kontrastiver Gegenüberstellung grammatischer Strukturen, die semantische, syntaktische Begabungen der Lernenden weitergebildet werden. Es soll aufgezeigt sein, wie man den Lehrenden darlegen kann, sodass sie mindestens so gut wie die digitalen Natives die neuen Technologien beherrschen, ihre alltägliche Arbeit erleichtern und unterstützen können.

1. Künstliche Intelligenz

Seit der Erfindung der Computer haben Menschen verschiedene Ansätze entwickelt, um die Betriebsgeschwindigkeit zu erhöhen und die physische Größe in verschiedenen Hardware- und Anwendungsarten zu reduzieren. Während sich die Nutzung von Computersystemen verbreitete, interessierten sich die Menschen dafür, ob eine Maschine wie ein Mensch denken, arbeiten und sich verhalten kann (Sharma & Garg, 2021). Das Interesse führte zur Entwicklung der Künstlichen Intelligenz (KI). In den 1940er Jahren begannen programmierbare digitale Computer, die auf mathematischem Denken basieren, das Konzept eines elektronischen Gehirns unter Wissenschaftlern zu entfachen (İpek et al., 2023; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2018). Die KI-Forschung wurde erstmals 1956 in den Vereinigten Staaten eingeleitet. Aufgrund konzeptioneller und praktischer Bedenken, Kritik und Finanzierungsengpässen war die Entwicklung der KI zunächst unbeständig, doch im 21. Jahrhundert nahm sie Fahrt auf. Die Anwendung von maschinellem Lernen auf verschiedene akademische und industrielle Probleme unter Einsatz neuer Techniken, leistungsstarker Computer und großer Datensätze führte zu einem zunehmenden Interesse und zur Investitionen in die KI (İpek et al., 2023; Newquist, 1994).

Der Begriff „Künstliche Intelligenz" hat in der Literatur mehrere Definitionen. Laut John McCarthy, dem Vater der KI, ist sie „die Wissenschaft und Technik, intelligente Maschinen zu entwickeln, insbesondere intelligente Computerprogramme". Anders ausgedrückt ist KI „ein Bereich der Informatik, in dem wir intelligente Maschinen schaffen, die wie Menschen denken, handeln und Entscheidungen treffen können" (John, 2019; Sharma & Garg, 2021).

Wenn von Künstlicher Intelligenz die Rede ist, bezieht man sich auf Computersysteme, die Aufgaben ausführen, die normalerweise mit Menschen in Verbindung gebracht werden, wie visuelle Erkennung, Sprachverarbeitung und -erzeugung, Informationsgenerierung oder autonomes Fahren. Diese Aufgaben stehen in engem

Zusammenhang mit den sensorischen, kommunikativen und physischen Fähigkeiten der Menschen und ihrer Umwelt. Es kann also gesagt werden, dass es Bestrebungen gibt, Computer menschlichem Verhalten und menschlichen Erfahrungen anzunähern. Die größte Gemeinsamkeit zwischen KI und dem Menschen in den meisten Anwendungsbereichen besteht darin, dass der Computer in der Lage ist, komplexe, scheinbar unstrukturierte Informationen zu verarbeiten und darauf zu reagieren. Dazu analysiert und klassifiziert er große Mengen an Beispieldaten (z. B. Sprachaufnahmen, Videos oder Bilder). In einigen Fällen muss das System nicht nur klassifizieren, sondern sich auch entsprechend dem erlernten Muster selbst (neu) generieren (Zehner, 2019).

Heutzutage werden Smartphones und Online-Übersetzungsprogramme häufig genutzt, um Sprachbarrieren zu überwinden, was die Distanzen zwischen Kulturen und Sprachen verringert. Mit der Entwicklung automatischer Übersetzungstools ist ein neues Konzept namens „KI-gestützte Übersetzung" entstanden. Während einige Ansichten besagen, dass mehr Szenarien erforderlich sind, um maschinellen Übersetzungsanwendungen eine größere Gleichwertigkeit mit menschlichen Übersetzern zu ermöglichen, vertreten andere die Meinung, dass zwischen maschinellen und menschlichen Übersetzungen immer noch eine unüberwindbare Leistungslücke besteht (Moneus & Sahari, 2024).

In den letzten Jahren hat es auch im Bildungsbereich bedeutende Entwicklungen im Bereich der KI-Technologien gegeben. Diese Technologien beeinflussen Lernumgebungen direkt oder indirekt und gestalten sie mit. In dieser Arbeit wird der Einsatz von KI-gestützten Übersetzungstools als Hilfsmittel im Bildungsbereich untersucht. In diesem Zusammenhang wird der Beitrag der Integration von KI-gestützten Übersetzungsprogrammen wie ‚ChatGPT', ‚DeepL' und ‚Google Translate' in den Deutsch/Türkisch-Übersetzungsunterricht analysiert.

1.1. ChatGPT

ChatGPT, dessen GPT-3.5-basierte Version im November 2022 von der Firma Open AI veröffentlicht wurde, erlangte aufgrund seiner fortschrittlichen KI-Fähigkeiten schnell internationale Popularität. Die Technologie von ChatGPT basiert auf der GPT-Architektur (Generative Pretrained Transformer), einem KI-Modell, das sich auf die Verarbeitung und Generierung natürlicher Sprache spezialisiert und zur Kategorie großer neuronaler Netze gehört. Seit 2020 wurden verschiedene Versionen entwickelt, darunter die GPT-4-basierte Version im März 2023. ChatGPT generiert textbasierte Ausgaben mit einem hohen Grad an Realismus. Nutzer können ChatGPT für eine Vielzahl von Aufgaben verwenden, wie z. B. das Erhalten von Informationen zu komplexen oder einfachen Themen, das Entdecken neuer wissenschaftlicher Forschungsergebnisse, das Erhalten personalisierter Produkt- und Serviceempfehlungen, das Schreiben und Debuggen von Computercode, das Erstellen maßgeschneiderter Texte und das Übersetzen von Inhalten in bis zu 95 unterstützte Sprachen, wobei die Qualität je nach Sprache variiert (Greene, 2024; Tekin, 2023).

Diese Interaktionen erfolgen über ein prompt basiertes Format, das menschlichen Dialog imitiert. ChatGPT nutzt generative KI, um auf der Grundlage großer Textdatensätze originalen Inhalt zu erstellen und Antworten auf Eingaben der Nutzer mit hohem Realismus zu generieren. Nutzer können zusätzliche Anweisungen und Klarstellungen in ihren Eingaben einfügen, damit ChatGPT Korrekturen, Überarbeitungen oder Anpassungen an seinen Ausgaben vornehmen kann (Greene, 2024).

Dank seiner breiten Funktionalität wird ChatGPT in verschiedenen Bereichen eingesetzt, darunter Wirtschaft, Forschung und Entwicklung, Journalismus, öffentliche Verwaltung, Bildung und Wissenschaft. In dieser Arbeit wird die Übersetzungsfunktion von ChatGPT als eine mögliche Anwendung im Bildungsbereich untersucht, insbesondere im Kontext der deutsch-türkischen Übersetzungen.

1.2. DeepL

DeepL wurde im August 2017 von Jaroslaw Kutylowski gegründet und ist ein KI-gestütztes Übersetzungstool. KI-Prozesse sind oft mehrdeutig, und es ist nicht leicht zu verstehen, wie ein Algorithmus zu Ergebnissen kommt, sodass KI-Systeme nicht immer erklärbar sind. An dieser Stelle kommt Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) ins Spiel. XAI wurde 2010 entwickelt und 2015 als eine neue Art von neuronalem Netzwerk implementiert, das in Bezug auf die Informationsverarbeitung transparenter ist. XAI ist eine Reihe von Verfahren, die helfen, Ergebnisse zu entwickeln, zu verstehen und zu interpretieren. Diese neue Methode wird auch als „Deep Learning" bezeichnet. Der Name des Übersetzungsprogramms DeepL stammt von der „Deep Learning"-Methode. DeepL arbeitet als Neuronales Maschinelles Übersetzungssystem (NMT) (Pellikka, 2024; Varela Salinas & Burbat, 2023).

Die NMT hat insofern einen Paradigmenwechsel herbeigeführt, als ihre Lernalgorithmen in Textkorpora gespeicherte Muster wiederverwenden und hervorragende Leistungen bei der Wortdarstellung und Wortvorhersage erbringen. Sie hat den Übersetzungsfluss erheblich verbessert, da sie erfolgreicher die Wortreihenfolge beibehält, funktionale Wörter korrekt platziert, die morphologische Kohäsion verbessert und eine bessere Wortwahl trifft. In diesem Zusammenhang hat DeepL die Erwartungen übertroffen und in den sozialen Medien viel Aufsehen erregt. Seine Bedeutung hat auch dadurch zugenommen, dass viele vertrauenswürdige Unternehmen dieses Übersetzungstool nutzen, das in 31 Sprachen übersetzen kann. Das von der Suchmaschine Linguee abgeleitete Übersetzungstool DeepL ermöglicht es den Nutzern auch, alle Dokumente wie PDFs, Word und PowerPoint zu übersetzen, ohne die Formatierung zu zerstören. Der wichtigste Unterschied zwischen DeepL und anderen Übersetzungstools besteht darin, dass die Übersetzungen von menschlichen Redakteuren und Muttersprachlern auf Nuancen hin kalibriert werden. Das Unternehmen beschäftigt weltweit 20 interne Redakteure und über tausend unter Vertrag stehende menschliche Übersetzer und Muttersprachler, um die Qualität der erstellten Übersetzungen zu beurteilen und sie auf ihre Genauigkeit zu überprüfen (Shrivastava, 2023; Varela Salinas & Burbat, 2023). DeepL wird auch als Übersetzungswerkzeug im Bildungsbereich eingesetzt. In dieser Studie wird die Leistung des Übersetzungstools DeepL für die deutsche Sprache analysiert.

1.3. Google Translate

Google Translate (GT) ist ein kostenloser mehrsprachiger maschineller Übersetzungsdienst, der 2006 von Google entwickelt wurde. Diese Technologie ist das Ergebnis jahrzehntelanger Bemühungen in den Bereichen Computerlinguistik und Künstliche Intelligenz. Das zugrundeliegende Prinzip von GT ist die statistische maschinelle Übersetzung. Der Erfolg der Google-Suchmaschine hat die rasche Entwicklung und den Erwerb eines breiten Portfolios von internetbasierten Diensten vorangetrieben. Ende 2016 revolutionierte Google das Grundprinzip seiner maschinellen

Übersetzungssoftware. Der Technologiekonzern führte ein künstliches neuronales Netzwerk ein, das es dem System ermöglicht, aus den vielen Beispielen, auf die es bei mehrsprachigen Texten stößt, zu lernen und so den statistischen Ansatz zu unterstützen. Diese Texte werden aus der Menge an sprachlichen Daten abgeleitet, die in Googles internetbasierten Dienstleistungsportfolio eingegeben, verarbeitet und gespeichert werden. Dieser Ansatz führte zu genaueren Übersetzungen zwischen häufiger im Internet verwendeten Sprachen (Urlaub & Dessein, 2022). Es wird behauptet, dass die maschinelle Übersetzung mit KI-Technologie ausgestattet ist, um Übersetzungen zwischen verschiedenen Sprachpaaren zu liefern, die „oft genauer und näher an der Art und Weise sind, wie Menschen sprechen" (Budiharjo, 2018).

GT übersetzt verschiedene Text- und Medienformen wie Wörter, Ausdrücke und Webseiten. Benutzer können es auf Websites verwenden oder die GT-Mobile-App auf ihre Telefone herunterladen. Es ermöglicht Benutzern, Texte, Fotos, Dokumente und sogar Websites von einer Sprache in eine andere zu übersetzen. Darüber hinaus bietet es viele weitere nützliche Funktionen, wie die Handschriftübersetzung, das Übersetzen von E-Mails in Gmail, das Herunterladen von Sprachen für die Offline-Nutzung, das Speichern häufig verwendeter Ausdrücke für den einfachen Zugriff usw. Heutzutage ist der Fortschritt von GT deutlich sichtbar, und es unterstützt Sprachen und Dialekte auf verschiedenen Ebenen, insgesamt 244 (Encyclopedia; Pham, 2024). Die Verwendung von GT als Übersetzungswerkzeug im Bildungsbereich war Gegenstand vieler Studien (López González & Pinzón Alarcón, 2023). In dieser Arbeit wird auch die Leistung von GT als Übersetzungsmittel für die deutsche Sprache untersucht.

2. Semantisch-syntaktischer Vergleich und Fehleranalyse in übersetzten Texttypen von KI-basierten Übersetzungsprogrammen

Wörter, Sätze oder Texte, die im Unterricht als Übersetzungsaufgabe vorkommen haben hauptsächlich eine inhaltliche Bedeutung (Semantik), sowie grammatische Struktur (Syntax). Ihre inhaltliche Bedeutung, also die Semantik hängt öfters von dem Texttyp oder der Textsorte ab. Die Aneinanderreihung dieser Äußerungen bedingt eine regelhafte Satzstruktur, die ihre Syntax hervorbringt. Um die äquivalente Übersetzung in der Semantik, sowie Syntax zu erreichen brauchen die Fremdsprachenlerner in erster Linie eine zweckmäßige Texterfassung. Dazu einen ausreichenden Wortschatz und gute Grammatikkenntnisse. Bei den KI- Tools, wie ChatGPT, DeepL und Google Translate wird dieser semantischer und syntaktischer Aufbau maschinell gesammelt und „bestimmte Daten aus einem Korpus extrahiert (Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister, 2006)." „Die Daten des Korpus sind typischerweise digitalisiert, d. h. auf Rechnern gespeichert und maschinenlesbar (Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister, 2006)." Doch manchmal sind die Übersetzungen nicht der Situation entsprechend. Inadäquate Übersetzungen werden als KI-Halluzinationen bezeichnet. „Diese „Halluzinationen" sind erfundene Antworten oder Daten, die semantisch korrekt erscheinen, aber faktisch falsch sind. Das bedeutet, dass die generierten Informationen zwar grammatikalisch korrekt und auf den ersten Blick plausibel sein können, aber dennoch völlig aus der Luft gegriffen sind. Diese Halluzinationen entstehen durch die Art und Weise, wie KI-Modelle Muster und Beziehungen in den Daten erkennen und nutzen. Wenn ein Modell auf unsichere oder unzureichende Informationen stößt, kann es kreative, aber ungenaue Antworten generieren (IT-PGmbH, 2024)." Genau diese Funktionsart der KI führt zu Fehlübersetzungen. Denn die Bedeutung eines Begriffs, besonders eines mehrdeutigen Begriffs, ist semantisch oder syntaktisch kontextabhängig. „Die Erschließung der

Bedeutung wird durch den Wortgebrauch im Textzusammenhang ermöglicht. Nur durch diese Einbettung der Wörter im Text, womit ihre Mehrdeutigkeit aufgerufen wird, kann die gemeinte Bedeutung herausgefunden werden (Uyanık, 2018).“ Da die KI-basierten Übersetzungsprogramme die kontextbedingte Bedeutungserschließung öfters als „Halluzinationen” wiedergeben, muss die Übersetzung überprüft werden. Während der Korrektur der Aufgabe kann ein semantisch-syntaktischer Vergleich gemacht und fehlerhafte und/oder korrekte Übersetzungen abgegrenzt werden. Somit können die Lernenden ihre Sprachkenntnisse semantisch, syntaktisch und grammatikalisch bereichern und sich in den gegenseitigen Sprachen weiterbilden. Im Folgenden der Arbeit werden einige Beispielübersetzungen mit KI-Tools zu schildern versucht. Übersetzung-Tools wie ChatGPT und DeepL haben auch gebührenpflichtige Programme, doch aufgrund der Erreichbarkeit der gebührenfreien, werden in dieser Arbeit besonders diese bevorzugt.

2.1. Durchführungsbeispiele im Übersetzungsunterricht:

Texte werden ihrer Entstehung nach eingeteilt. Öfters nur als literarische und nicht literarische, als Sachtexte/Gebrauchstexte und fiktive Texte (Koller, 1979) oder als informative- , expressive- und operative Texte (Reiß, 1971). Weil „Informationstexte Ansichten, Kenntnisse und Wissen vermitteln; sprachlich hauptsächlich vom Redegegenstand gestaltet sind und auf die Anschaulichkeit der denotativen Bedeutung basieren (Brinker, 2010)”, werden anfänglich kurze Abschnitte aus Zeitungsberichte und wissenschaftliche Texte übersetzt. Als erstes Beispiel wird ein Satz von einem Bericht aus der führenden Nachrichtenseite „Die Welt” zu bearbeiten versucht. Die Überschrift der Nachricht heißt: „Grünen-Politikerin will Rückwärtseinparken in Kiel verbieten”.

Beispiel 1:

„Die Kieler Mobilitätsdezernentin Alke Voß (Grüne) will rückwärts Ein- und Ausparken auf Grundstückszufahrten verbieten.” (*Die Welt*, 2024)

ChatGPT:	DeepL:	Google Translate:
“Kiel’in Ulaşım Dairesi Başkanı Alke Voß (Yeşiller), mülk girişlerinde geri geri park etmeyi ve çıkmayı yasaklamak istiyor.”	Kiel’in mobilite başkanı Alke Voß (Yeşiller), mülk erişim yollarındaki park yerlerine geri geri girip çıkmayı yasaklamak istiyor.	Kiel hareketlilik departmanı başkanı Alke Voß (Yeşiller), mülkün garaj yollarındaki park yerlerine geri geri girip çıkmanın yasaklanmasını istiyor.

Der ausgesuchte Satz ist ein einfacher Hauptsatz ohne schwere grammatikalische Strukturen und Fremdwörter. Aber Begriffe wie „Mobilitätsdezernentin” und „Grundstückszufahrt” sind Wörter, die anstatt einer Bedeutungsübertragung eine Sinnübertragung fordern. Die Übersetzungen von den Programmen der KI lauten wie oben.

	ChatGPT	DeepL	Google Translate
Mobilitätsdezernentin	Ulaşım Dairesi	mobilite başkanı	hareketlilik departmanı
	Başkanı		Başkanı
Grundstückszufahrt	mülk girişi	mülk erişim yolları	mülkün garaj yolu

Wenn auch der Begriff „Mobilität" in Wörterbüchern und diesen Programmen als „hareketlilik" oder „devingenlik" übersetz wird, entspricht es sinnlich nicht dem gemeinten. Selbstverständlich hört sich „ulaşım", bei der Übertragung von ChatGPT äquivalent an, doch der Possessivsuffix (-er) bei „Kieler Mobilitätsdezernentin" braucht keine grammatikalische Entgegnung. Eine Übersetzung wie „Kiel Ulaşım Dairesi Başkanı" klingt zielsprachlicher.

Trotz der gleichen Meinung kommt die Übertragung von „Grundstückszufahrt" in jeder Übersetzung unterschiedlich vor und keine ist die aussprechweise im Türkischen. Zwar kann „mülk girişi" als die richtigere Übersetzung angenommen werden, aber heutzutage wird eher „Bina girişi" benutzt. In allen drei Übersetzungen sind abweichende Alternativen angeboten. An diese Möglichkeiten anhaltend könnte eine Übersetzung wie unten ausgeschlossen werden:

„Kiel Ulaşım Dairesi Başkanı Alke Voß (Yeşiller), park ederken bina girişlerinde geri geri girip çıkmayı yasaklamak istiyor."

Beispiel 2:

Ampel-Streit schürt Zweifel an Handlungsfähigkeit der Bundesregierung (*Die Welt*, 2023)

ChatGPT:	DeepL:	Google Translate:
Trafik lambası koalisyonundaki anlaşmazlık, federal hükümetin harekete geçme kapasitesine dair şüpheleri körüklüyor.	Ampel anlaşmazlığı federal hükümetin harekete geçme kabiliyetine ilişkin şüpheleri artırıyor	Trafik ışığı anlaşmazlığı federal hükümetin harekete geçme yeteneği hakkında şüpheler uyandırıyor

Wieder ist ein einfacher Hauptsatz aus einem informierenden Text zu übersetzen. Aber in diesem Satz kommen besondere Bezeichnungen, die Allgemeinbildung, das Weltwissen und sogar die Bundespolitik zum Ausdruck. Hier müssen die Lernenden Bescheid wissen, dass Deutschland eine Regierungskoalition aus drei politischen Parteien hat. Weil die Farben dieser Parteien; SPD (rot), FDP (gelb) und den Grünen (grün), der „Ampel" ähneln, werden sie als die Ampelkoalition genannt. Dementsprechend repräsentiert „Ampel Streit" die Unstimmigkeit zwischen ihnen. Wieder wird mit „Handlungsfähigkeit der Bundesregierung", das „Imstande sein der Bundesregierung" bezweckt.

In der Übersetzung von ChatGPT ist deutlich zu sehen, dass mit der Ampel die Koalition der Bundesregierung beabsichtigt wird. Wogegen an den Antworten der DeepL und Google Translate das Gemeinte nicht zu verstehen ist. Die DeepL, behandelt „Ampel" als Sondernamen und Google Translate übersetzt es wörtlich. Wenn der Lerner keine Erfahrung über die deutsche Politik hat, ist es unmöglich herauszufinden, was mit dem Ampelstreit gemeint ist.

„Koalisyon anlaşmazlığı Alman hükümetinin yürütme yetkisi çalışabilmesine ilişkin / kanuni ehliyeti konusundaki şüpheleri artırıyor"

Beispiel 3:

Im dritten Beispiel wird ein wissenschaftlicher Text zu übersetzen versucht. Wissenschaftliche Texte enthalten feste Informationen, die allgemein anerkannt, nachvollziehbar und fundiert sind. Der Wesenszug ist ihre wissenschaftliche Sprache und fachspezifische Terminologie, die während ihrer Übersetzung unbedingt bewahrt werden muss. Der Begriff „Morphologie" hat in unterschiedlichen Wissenschaften diverse Bedeutungen. Um die Übersetzung sprachwissenschaftlich zu begrenzen, wurde in die Übersetzung–Tools ein ganzer Absatz eingeschrieben. Trotzdem ergab sich die Fachtermini nicht wie abgezielt.

> Die Morphologie, die Formenlehre, untersucht die sinntragenden Formeinheiten einer Sprache. Ein Morphem kann ein Wort sein, aber auch eine Silbe, die die Bedeutung eines Wortes ändert, ist ein Morphem. Zum Beispiel lässt sich das Wort Sprachen in zwei Morpheme zerlegen: in den Wortstamm sprach- und das Pluralmorphem –en. (Germanistische Sprachwissenschaft, S. 14)

Der Abschnitt lautet wie oben. Die Übersetzungen vom sprachwissenschaftlichen Begriff wie unten:

	ChatGPT	**DeepL**	**Google Translate**
Morphologie	morfoloji	morfoloji	morfoloji
Formenlehre:	şekil bilgisi	-	biçim teorisi

Der Begriff „Morphologie" wird auch im Türkischen mit dem universalen Namen benutzt. Alle drei Übersetzungsprogramme wiedergeben es gleich. Doch Morphologie wird in Wörterbüchern mit „biçim bilim, şekil bilgisi, yapı bilgisi, morfoloji" wiedergegeben. Wieder wird ihre Anwendung in morphologischen und grammatikalischen Arbeiten fachsprachlich unterschieden (Kamacı Gencer, 2021). Da es ein wissenschaftlicher Text ist, sollte die fachspezifische Terminologie bewahrt werden. In türkischen wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten über Morphologie kommt „biçim bilim" vor. Diese Übersetzungsmöglichkeit wäre für die Wortschatzerweiterung der Lerner hilfreicher und fachspezifischer.

Die Übersetzung für „Formenlehre" betrifft mit „şekil bilgisi" wörtlich und fachsprachlich passend. Dagegen entspricht das Ergebnis von DeepL und Google Translate überhaupt nicht. Laut DeepL ist „Morphologie die […] Untersuchung von Formen […], analysiert die formalen bedeutungstragenden Einheiten einer Sprache" und Google Translate definiert „Morphologie, [als] die Formen Theorie, [die] die bedeutungstragenden Einheiten einer Sprache" untersucht:

ChatGPT:	**DeepL:**	**Google Translate:**
Morfoloji, yani şekil bilgisi, bir dilin anlam taşıyan biçim birimlerini inceler.	**Biçimlerin incelenmesi olan morfoloji**, bir dilin anlam taşıyan **biçimsel** birimlerini analiz eder.	**Biçim teorisi** olan morfoloji, bir dilin anlamlı biçim birimlerini inceler.

Eine Übersetzung wie: „***Biçimbilim, yani şekil bilgisi, bir dilin anlam taşıyan biçim birimlerini inceler.***

Beispiel 4:

Im vierten und fünften Beispiel wird mit literarischen Textabschnitten fortgesetzt. Diese Texte unterscheiden sich von Gebrauchstexten durch ihren künstlich gestalteten Inhalt und deren ästhetische Vermittlung. Diese expressiv betonte Texte, danken ihre Ästhetik der bildhaften Sprache, die durch Äußerungsmöglichkeiten der Gefühle des Verfassers hervorkommende rhetorische Figuren, Sprichwörter, Redewendungen, Metaphern, usw., entsteht. Genau dieser Unterschied erschwert die Übersetzung. Denn um die gleiche Wirkung im Zieltext zu erreichen, wird die gleiche Gegenentsprechung in der Zielsprache benötigt. Besonders hier führt die künstliche Intelligenz öfters zu Fehlübersetzungen. Die in Texte eingebettete bildhaften Ausdrücken können aus dem Kontext nicht ausformuliert werden und die ästhetische Sprache verliert ihre Wirkung. Unten wird es mit einem kurzen literarischen Textabschnitt aus dem Werk „Siddhartha" von Hermann Hesse aufzustellen versucht.

> Ihn, der in der Liebe noch ein Knabe war und dazu neigte, sich blindlings und unersättlich in die Lust zu stürzen wie ins Bodenlose, lehrte sie von Grund auf die Lehre, dass man Lust nicht nehmen kann, ohne Lust zu geben, und jede Gebärde, jedes Streicheln, jede Berührung, jeder Anblick, jede kleinste Stelle des Körpers ihr Geheimnis hat, das zu wecken dem Wissenden Glück bereitet. (Hesse, 2004, S. 66)

ChatGPT:	**DeepL:**	**Google Translate:**
Onu, aşkta hâlâ bir çocuk olan ve kendini körü körüne, doyumsuzca hazza kaptırmaya, dipsiz bir uçuruma atılmaya eğilimli olan kişiyi, o kadın temelden öğretti: Haz almak, haz vermeden mümkün değildir ve her hareket, her okşayış, her dokunuş, her bakış, bedenin en küçük noktası bile bir sır taşır ve bu sırrı uyandırmak bilen kişi için bir mutluluk kaynağıdır.	Hâlâ aşık bir çocuk olan ve dipsiz bir kuyuya düşer gibi körü körüne ve doyumsuzca şehvete dalma eğiliminde olan ona, şehvet vermeden şehvet alamayacağını ve her hareketin, her okşamanın, her dokunuşun, her görüntünün, vücudun en küçük parçasının bir sırrı olduğunu ve bu sırrı uyandırmanın bilenlere mutluluk getirdiğini öğretti.	Hâlâ aşık bir çocuk olan ve kendini dipsiz bir kuyuya körü körüne ve doyumsuzca atmaya çalışan ona, haz vermeden haz alınamayacağı temel dersini vermişti ve her jest, her okşama, her okşama. Her dokunuşun, her görüntünün, bedenin en küçük parçasının kendi sırrı vardır ki, uyanmak onu bilenlere mutluluk getirir.

Die Übersetzungsalternativen der drei KI-Tools zeigen, dass die sprachliche Struktur des Textes zu bewahren versucht, doch die ästhetische Wirkung im Originaltext nicht mehr fühlbar, ist. Auch die Durchschaubarkeit des Abschnitts ist verloren. Da diese Programme die Übersetzung des sämtlichen Werks nicht ermöglichen, fällt auch kontextsituierte Bedeutungserschließung schwer. Bei einer literarischen Übersetzung ist es „erforderlich, die Kultur, Geschichte, Gestaltungsweise der Gefühle und Gedanken sowie die linguistische Struktur und die Besonderheit des Sprachgebrauchs der Ausgangssprache (auch des Autors) gut zu kennen. Denn literarische Übersetzung ist eine Sprach- und Kulturarbeit. Daher reicht es nicht aus, ausschließlich die Standartsprache zu beherrschen" (Arslan Karabulut, 2020). Für die analoge ästhetische Wirkung in der Zielsprache soll Lexik, Syntax, Stil und Aufbau in Acht gehalten werden. Şipal hat in seiner Übersetzung neben Form und Inhalt, auch den bildhaften Eindruck dem Zielsprachenleser entsprechend wiedergeben:

> Sevgide henüz bir çocuk sayılan ve körü körüne, doymak bilmeksizin dipsiz bir uçuruma dalar gibi sevi hazlarından içeri dalmaya heveslenen Siddharta, haz vermeden haz alınamayacağını, her jestin, her okşayışın, her dokunuşun, her bakışın, ne kadar küçük olursa olsun vucüttaki her köşenin kendine özgü bir gizle donatıldığını, bu gizi keşfetmenin keşfeden kişiyi mutlu kılacağını öğrendi Kamala'dan. (Hesse, Siddhartha, 2006, s. 72. Çeviren: Kamuran Şipal)

Beispiel 5:

Hauptsächlich literarische Texte enthalten bildhafte Ausdrücke, die nicht wörtlich wiedergeben werden können. Sie bergen kulturelle Komponente, deren Bedeutung und Sinn nur aus Wertvorstellung, Sittlichkeit und Lebensart der Gesellschaft entschlüsselt werden kann. Bei der Übersetzung dieser rhetorischen Figuren ist es wichtig die Sinnübertragung zu erhalten. Weil die zukünftigen Übersetzungsprogramme gespeicherte Muster aus aufgeladenen Textkorpora verwenden, ist der gesuchte Ausdruck in diesen Korpora öfters nicht erreichbar. Deswegen kommen bei maschineller Übersetzung KI-Halluzinationen vor. In diesem Beispiel kommt ein Text mit vielen Redewendungen aus dem Lehrbuch „Mittelstufe Deutsch". Die Übersetzungen der drei KI-Tools wird den Fremdsprachenlernern zeigen, auf welchen sprachlichen Ebenen sie besonders achten müssen. Hier wird als Beispiel nur der erste Abschnitt des Textes übersetzt.

> Unser Juniorchef hatte immer nur Rosinen im Kopf. Er selbst wollte natürlich auf großem Fuß leben. Wir sollten uns alle mächtig ins Zeug legen, aber er selbst wollte sich kein Bein ausreißen.
>
> Bald war die Firma bei allen Banken in der Kreide. Bei diesen hohen Zinsen konnten wir ja auf keinen grünen Zweig kommen. Das wurde nicht an die große Glocke gehängt. Und wir als Arbeiter wussten natürlich nicht, wie der Hase läuft. Wir dachten, wir sitzen noch fest im Sattel. Und dabei stand der Firma das Wasser bis zum Hals.
>
> Eines Tages musste aber auch der Juniorchef klein beigehen. Da hat er die Katze aus dem Sack gelassen und erklärt, dass er uns feuern müsste. Der Betriebsrat hat dann zum Glück alle Hebel in Bewegung gesetzt, und so sind wir noch mal mit einem blauen Auge davongekommen (Schumann, 2006, s. 195).

ChatGPT:	**DeepL:**	**Google Translate:**
Genç patronumuzun her zaman aklında sadece yüksek hedefler vardı. Kendisi büyük bir lüks içinde yaşamak istiyordu. Hepimizin çok çalışmasını bekliyordu ama kendisi hiçbir zahmete katlanmak istemiyordu.	Küçük patronumuzun aklında sadece sultani üzüm vardı. Elbette kendisi de lüks bir hayat yaşamak istiyordu. Hepimizin çok çalışmasını istiyordu ama kendisi ter dökmek bile istemiyordu.	Kıdemsiz patronumuzun kafasında her zaman sadece kuru üzüm vardı. Elbette kendisi de geniş ölçekte yaşamak istiyordu. Hepimiz elimizden gelenin en iyisini yapmalıyız ama o yolundan çekilmek istemedi.

Gleichgültig wie sekundenschnell auch die KI ist, wenn Ergebnisse der Übersetzungsprogramme verglichen werden, ist es deutlich zu sehen, dass anstatt zielsprachlich-situationsgemäße Redewendungen entweder wörtliche Übersetzungen oder Fehlübersetzungen angegeben werden. In der Übersetzung von ChatGPT wird die Bedeutung der Redewendungen weitestgehend bewahrt. Doch der Text verliert an Form und Stil, das eigentlich den feinen Ton erhöht. In einem Bericht von NDR macht Heide Franck aufmerksam, dass literarische Übersetzung ein Spezialfall ist und meint: „Abgesehen vom literarischen Anspruch geht es beim Literaturübersetzen auch meistens nicht um Präzision, sondern (…) um Stimmungen, um Klang, um Rhythmus, um Humor, Poesie, um Bezüge zu anderen Texten, zur Welt - oder auch zu dem, was eine Seite zuvor gesagt wurde (Büchsenmann, 2024)." All diese Werte sind in den Übersetzungen verloren. Die stilistischen Einschränkungen der maschinellen Übersetzung vermindern die Zieltextqualität. Sie haben „keinen Sinn für Kontext, Wortspiele, Ambiguität, Polysemie, Metaphern oder rhetorische Verfahren wie Assonanz und Alliteration." Sie kann […] keine Eleganz oder Schönheit herstellen, es gibt Probleme mit der stilistischen Kohärenz oder dem Abweichen davon (zitiert nach Lippert, 2024)." Im Weiteren werden die Redewendungübersetzungen verglichen und mit Vorschlägen zu übersetzen versucht.

	ChatGPT	**DeepL**	**Google Translate**
Rosinen im Kopf haben	Aklında sadece yüksek hedefler vardı	aklında sadece sultani üzüm vardı.	kafasında her zaman sadece kuru üzüm vardı
Auf großem Fuß leben	büyük bir lüks içinde yaşamak	lüks bir hayat yaşamak	geniş ölçekte yaşamak
sich ins Zeug legen	Hepimizin çok çalışmasını bekliyordu	Hepimizin çok çalışmasını bekliyordu	Hepimiz elimizden gelenin en iyisini yapmalıyız
sich kein Bein ausreißen	kendisi hiçbir zahmete katlanmak istemiyordu	kendisi ter dökmek bile istemiyordu	yolundan çekilmek istemedi

Wie es in der Tabelle oben zu sehen ist, sind in den Übersetzungen entweder wie bei ChatGPT, mit Bedeutungen der Redewendungen oder mit einer wörtlichen Übertragung der Begriffe, wie in DeepL und GT wiederzugeben versucht. Wobei der Originaltext in ChatGPT noch verständlich angenommen werden kann, verliert es in den anderen Übersetzungen an jedem Wert. Wogegen „bei einer Übertragung am wichtigsten das Verstehen vom Gemeinten ist (Demiral & Kaya, 2013)." Die Redewendungen könnten im Türkischen wie unten in den Zieltext eingebettet werden. Doch auch hier spielt die Auswahl nach dem Kontext eine wichtige Rolle.

Redewendung	**Erklärung**	**Türkische Redewendung**
Rosinen im Kopf haben	unrealistische Träume haben	aklı bir karış havada olmak
auf großem Fuß leben	teuer leben	bir eli yağda bir eli balda yaşamak
sich ins Zeug legen	viel arbeiten	elini taşın altına koymak
sich kein Bein ausreißen	sich nicht bemühen	kılını kıpırdatmamak
bei j-m in der Kreide sein	Schulden bei j-m haben	borçlu olmak
auf keinen grünen Zweig kommen	keinen Erfolg haben	bir baltaya sap olamamak
an die große Glocke hängen	allen erzählen	cümle aleme duyurmak
wie der Hase läuft	wie es geschieht/ funktioniert	işlerin nasıl yürüdüğünü bilmek
fest im Sattel sitzen	ungefährlicher Position sein	yeri sağlam olmak
j-m das Wasser bis zum Hals stehen	in großen Schwierigkeiten stecken	boğazına kadar batmak / bıçak kemiğe dayanmak
die Katze aus dem Sack lassen	ein Geheimnis lüften	ağzındaki baklayı çıkarmak
alle Hebel in Bewegung setzten	alle Maßnahmen treffen	elinden geleni yapmak
mit blauen Auge davongekommen	ohne große Schaden überstehen	ucuz kurtulmak

Eine im Unterricht gemeinsam ausgeübte Übersetzung könnte den Lernenden wegweisen und zeigen, welche Schritte sie für eine zielgerechte Übersetzung folgen sollen.

> *Genç patronumuzun hep uçuk hayalleri vardı. Kendisi tabiki de hep bir eli yağda bir eli balda yaşamak istiyordu. Biz dişimizi tırnağımıza takıp çalışmalıydık; o, kılını bile kıpırdatmak istemezdi.*
>
> *Kısa zamanda şirket tüm bankalara borçlandı. Bu yüksek faizlerle işin içinden çıkamazdık. Tabiki bunu cümle aleme ilan etmeye gerek yoktu ve biz çalışanlar herşeyden bihaberdik. Hala yerimiz sağlam sanıyorduk. Meğer şirket boğazına kadar batmış.*

Bir gün genç patronumuz da pes etmek zorunda kaldı ve bizi sepetlemek zorunda olduğunu ağzından kaçırdı. Allahtan sendika başkanı elinden geleni yaptı da ucuz kurtulduk.

3. Schluss – Diskussion über Vor- und Nachteile der Nutzung von KI-basierten Übersetzungsprogramme

Die Arbeit deutete die bedeutende Rolle von dem digitalen Wandel im Übersetzungsunterricht an und behandelte den Einsatz von KI-basierten Übersetzungsprogrammen, wie ChatGPT, DeepL und Google Translate. Mit Beispielübersetzungen aus Gebrauchs- und literarischen Texten wurden die Ergebnisse diesen drei KI-Tools verglichen und ihre Authentizität überprüft. Nebenbei wurde versucht festzustellen, inwieweit sie den Lehrkräften die alltägliche Arbeit übernehmen.

Die Gegenüberstellungen der Übersetzungen zeigten, dass die Anwendung von KI-basierten Übersetzungsprogrammen Vorteile wie Nachteile haben können. Während sie das Erlernen von Wortschatz unterstützen und als Wörterbuch sehr schnell und praktisch dienen, genügt bei manchen Fällen allein die Bedeutungsübertragung nicht aus. Diese automatischen Übersetzungen bieten den Lehrenden und Lernenden die Entwicklung von Satzstrukturen und kreative Ideen für andere Alternativen, doch es kommt auch öfters zu Fehlübersetzungen in Syntax und/oder Semantik. Öfters ist Weltwissen, Kulturwissen und Allgemeinbildung eine Notwendigkeit bei der Übersetzung. Wenn auch Texte aus der alltäglichen Politik auf feste Information basieren, fördern Sie bundespolitologische Kenntnisse, sowie Landeskunde und Geschichte. Der Lehrende / Lernende braucht ein kritisches Bewusstsein in den gegenseitigen Sprachen.

Die digitalen Übersetzungsprogramme ChatGPT, DeepL und Google Translate, übersetzen Gebrauchstexte, die Kenntnisse und Wissen ermitteln und denotative Bedeutungen bergen, zutreffender als literarische Texte. Stilistische Feinheiten, idiomatische Ausdrücke, Form und Inhalt in ästhetischen Texten werden vernachlässigt. Die Wirkung beim Leser, die durch die bildhafte Sprache hervorkommt, ist auch nicht mehr zu spüren. All diese Unterschiede können im Übersetzungsunterricht den Lernenden vorgeführt und mit Beispielen aufgezeigt werden, was sie bei digitalen Übersetzungen achten müssen. Somit kann durch Fehleranalyse der Übungen richtige Wortauswahl, syntaktische Reihenfolge und semantische Äquivalenz in beiden Sprachen festgestellt werden.

Wieder bietet der Einsatz dieser KI-Tools im Übersetzungsunterricht eine interaktive und praxisnahe Durchführung. Während des Unterrichts beschäftigen sich die Lernenden mit ihren Handys, Tablets oder Computer unterrichtsorientiert. Auch die Lehrkraft gewinnt an Zeit und Energie, indem er die Lerner mit aktuellen Aufgaben betätigt. Doch es steht aus der Sicht der Lernenden die Gefahr, dass sie sich zu sehr auf diese Hilfsmittel verlassen und ihre eigenen sprachlichen Fähigkeiten weniger aktiv entwickeln.

Zukünftige Forschungen könnten sich darauf konzentrieren, wie diese Tools noch gezielter für spezifische Lernziele genutzt werden können und welche didaktischen Methoden ihren Einsatz am besten ergänzen. Insgesamt zeigt sich, dass die pädagogische Übersetzung mit KI eine wertvolle Bereicherung für den DaF-Unterricht darstellt, wenn sie bewusst und reflektiert eingesetzt wird.

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The Poetics of Refusal: Bartleby's Language and the Violence of Signification in "Bartleby, the Scrivener"

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Abstract

In "Bartleby, the Scrivener," Herman Melville presents a character whose passive refusal, encapsulated in the repeated phrase "I would prefer not to," challenges power, agency, and social norms. This essay examines how Bartleby's refrain acts as both an assertion of autonomy and a critique of the violence inherent in language. By rejecting his employer's commands, Bartleby disrupts the rational, efficiency-driven logic of the workplace, exposing the violence embedded in linguistic norms. Slavoj Žižek's concept of language as inherently violent—through its imposition of norms and standards—illuminates how Bartleby's refusal goes beyond protest, creating a space of resistance that defies interpretation and subverts power dynamics. Bartleby's language, neither a clear denial nor an expression of desire, becomes a radical negation that questions the very nature of meaning. Ultimately, Bartleby's refusal does not propose a new order but disrupts the structures of meaning and authority, forcing us to confront the limits of language itself.

Keywords: *Bartleby, Herman Melville, Slavoj Žižek, violence, language, signification*

Introduction

Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) tells the story of a lawyer who hires Bartleby, a scrivener, to work in his office. Initially diligent, Bartleby begins to repeatedly refuse tasks with the phrase "I would prefer not to," gradually intensifying his subtle rebellion. As his defiance grows, the lawyer is forced to confront the limits of his authority and the dehumanizing nature of institutional life, ultimately abandoning Bartleby to a life of isolation. The story presents one of literature's most enigmatic characters, whose refusal has sparked debates on themes ranging from existential rebellion to passive resistance.

The narrator, a seasoned lawyer committed to logic, reason, and the law, operates in an environment where language enforces authority. His scriveners diligently copy legal documents, reflecting the rigid structure of the legal system. Bartleby's refusal disrupts this order, challenging both office protocols and societal expectations. The lawyer's failed attempts to rationalize Bartleby's resistance reveal the limitations of logic and expose how institutional roles dehumanize individuals. Furthermore, Bartleby's withdrawal highlights the underlying violence in communication. The narrator's repeated efforts to control Bartleby only emphasize his inability to manage these forces.

This essay examines how Bartleby's refrain acts as both an assertion of autonomy and a critique of the violence inherent in language. By rejecting his employer's commands, Bartleby disrupts the rational, efficiency-driven logic of the workplace, exposing the

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violence embedded in linguistic norms. Slavoj Žižek's concept of language as inherently violent—through its imposition of norms and standards—illuminates how Bartleby's refusal goes beyond protest, creating a space of resistance that defies interpretation and subverts power dynamics. Bartleby's language, neither a clear denial nor an expression of desire, becomes a radical negation that questions the very nature of meaning. Ultimately, Bartleby's refusal does not propose a new order but disrupts the structures of meaning and authority, forcing us to confront the limits of language itself.

It is worth noting that the story has captivated theorists and cultural critics for years, among them Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Slavoj Žižek. [2] Written in 1853, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" continues to resonate today, presciently addressing issues like the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement and the global COVID-19 lockdowns.[3] Its enduring significance underscores the persistent relevance of Melville's work in the contemporary world.

Bartleby's Words and the Violence of Language

Before Bartleby arrives in the office, the narrator manages to run his business smoothly, despite occasional issues with his two scriveners—such as old age or indigestion—that temporarily affect their efficiency. The narrator also emphasizes the importance of naming, underscoring the connection between words and the things they represent. The names of his three employees—Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger-Nut—serve as fitting labels, with each nickname perfectly corresponding to the traits or behaviors they embody. These names highlight the correspondence between identity and function. The office, as depicted, operates with a sense of economic efficiency, and the success of the business is deeply tied to the rational use of language.

> Everything operates seamlessly until Bartleby arrives, challenging the established assumptions and social values. Initially, Bartleby appears to be a competent and helpful new scrivener. However, on the third day of his employment, when the narrator asks him to proofread a document alongside his colleagues, Bartleby responds 'in a singularly mild, firm voice,' saying, 'I would prefer not to' (165). For the narrator, who is accustomed to the 'haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance,' this response is both absurd and unacceptable. So surprising is Bartleby's answer that the narrator cannot believe his ears.
>
> I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, 'I would prefer not to.'
>
> 'Prefer not to,' echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. 'What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it,' and I thrust it towards him.
>
> 'I would prefer not to,' said he. (165–66)

[2] For a more in-depth analysis of these theorists' interpretations of "Bartleby, the Scrivener," see Kevin Attell's "Language and Labor, Silence and Stasis: Bartleby among the Philosophers" (2013). Additionally, read the chapter on "Bartleby" in Lea Bertani Vozar Newman's *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Herman Melville* (1986), pp. 19-78.

[3] For more details, read Lauren Klein's "What Bartleby Can Teach Us About Occupy Wall Street" (2011); Regina Dilgen's "The Original Occupy Wall Street: Melville's 'Bartleby, the Scrivener"'(2012); Roberta Bienvenu's "Bartleby the Scrivener Occupies Wall Street"(2013); Lee Edelman's "Occupy Wall Street: 'Bartleby' (2013); Russ Castronovo's "Occupy Bartleby" (2014); Mary Eyring's "Bartleby's Insights on Complex Embodiment for a Post-pandemic World" (2024).

The lawyer assumes that anyone in his office who is not "moon-struck" will simply comply with his orders and immediately attend to his requests. Strictly speaking, the narrator is not posing a question, nor is Bartleby in a position to make choices. As an employer, the narrator merely "state[d] what it was [he] wanted him [Bartleby] to do" (165). Any disobedience, in this context, is perceived as perverse or pathological—an excess or violation of social norms. Bartleby's response, "I would prefer not to," functions like a short-circuit in an otherwise efficient network, where the workplace hierarchy dictates how individuals speak and behave. To secure a job and a place in society, one's speech and actions must adhere to established rules and expectations.

With a mixture of confusion and indignation, the narrator attempts to clarify his order, still hoping to resolve the conflict through verbal communication—but to no avail. His next move is to approach Bartleby and "thrust" the paper toward him, as if attempting to force him to comply. The word "thrust"—to push, press, or drive with force—carries violent connotations. The inadequacy of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" in this context, and the violent response it provokes, compel us to reconsider the social norms and rational language we typically take for granted.

The medium through which the narrator communicates, issues orders, and engages in argumentation—language itself—reveals itself to be inherently violent. Language, often regarded as the fundamental tool for renouncing violence, promoting understanding, and fostering mutual recognition, is, in fact, deeply entangled in a system of violence that operates at both visible and invisible levels. Slavoj Žižek offers a compelling argument that language is not merely a neutral medium but is implicated in an "unconditional violence" that permeates our interactions. In his *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Žižek notes that the very act of perceiving something as violent relies on a presupposed standard of what is understood as "normal" or "non-violent." This idea hinges on the concept that violence can only be recognized in relation to a contrasting norm. He writes, "When we perceive something as an act of violence, we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the 'normal' non-violent situation is—and the highest form of violence is the imposition of this standard with reference to which some events appear as 'violent'" (64).

In other words, by establishing what is "normal" or "non-violent," we create a framework within which actions, behaviors, and even words are classified as either conforming to this standard or deviating from it. In this context, labeling something as "violent" constitutes a form of violence itself, as it enforces a restrictive system of meaning that imposes an arbitrary dichotomy between what is acceptable and what is not. This imposition of a normative structure is neither neutral nor benign; it is inherently coercive and violent.

Žižek's argument hinges on the notion that the structure of language and the act of defining violence within it are always situated in relation to an imagined, idealized state of non-violence. This non-violence, in turn, becomes the benchmark by which everything else is measured. However, in seeking to delineate what is violent, the act of defining it through comparison to non-violence is, paradoxically, itself a form of violence. Non-violence is not simply the absence of violence; rather, it is a presupposed, predefined standard that, by its very existence, erases the possibility of recognizing or engaging with violence in more complex or nuanced ways. Non-violence, as a conceptual ideal, becomes a tool of violence, reinforcing social hierarchies and power structures under the guise of maintaining order and harmony.

In a sense, the very categorization of violence as something deviant or excessive relies on an ideological construction of normalcy that is itself violent. It is the imposition of this

supposed standard of "normalcy"—a norm that is never fully accessible or unproblematic—that shapes the experience of violence in ways that can be deeply damaging. When we ask what violence is, we are already assuming a clear line between violent and non-violent actions. Yet, Žižek suggests that this division is artificial and problematic. The process of categorization and comparison that underpins the language of violence produces its own form of violence by simplifying complex situations into easily digestible binaries that serve the interests of those who hold the power to define and label.

This insight reveals a paradox that lies at the heart of the relationship between language and violence: the act of renouncing or negating violence through language may end up reproducing the very structures of violence it aims to dismantle. This brings us to the troubling question raised by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921–22): "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (as cited in Pinker, 2007, p. 134). If language shapes our perception of reality and serves as the foundation for how we understand the world, then the limits of what we can say—the way we construct meaning, define relationships, and categorize experiences—determine the boundaries of what we can know, feel, and change. In this context, if language is the medium through which we engage with and shape the world, how can we possibly eliminate the violence inherent in it without merely reproducing those same dynamics of power and coercion?

This leads to a further complication: How can we engage in a process of undoing the violence of language? Can we "torture" the word itself, rip it from its conventional references, and allow it to lose its violent connotations? If negation—the act of saying "no" to violence—is itself a form of violence, can we escape the trap of language altogether, or is there no way out? Wittgenstein's philosophy suggests that once we recognize the limitations of language, we face a fundamental dilemma. Language, by its very structure, limits and frames our world, and yet we are bound to it. The very tools we might use to critique language are enmeshed in its system. Is it possible to step outside the logic of language in such a way that we no longer reproduce violence in our resistance to it? Can we truly escape the conditions that language imposes upon us, or must we learn to live within its constraints, recognizing that language always involves a degree of violence in its imposition of meaning?

This tension—the desire to escape violence while remaining within the very structures that produce it—forms a core dilemma in understanding the role of language in shaping human experience. The attempt to overcome language's violence, without merely shifting it or replacing one violent form with another, leads us into an impasse. In the quest to eliminate the violence of language, we must grapple with the paradox that language itself, in all its forms, is a battlefield—a place where the limits of our understanding, our capacity for empathy, and our ability to negotiate conflict are continually tested. Ultimately, it may be that language, as Žižek suggests, is never neutral, never simply a tool for communication, but always implicated in the violent dynamics of power and representation that shape our world. And yet, it remains the only means through which we can attempt to express the very problem of violence itself.

The Power of "I Would Prefer Not To"

An analysis of Bartleby's unusual and obsessive relationship to language can offer new insights into these questions. As a scrivener—a mere copier of legal documents—Bartleby does not possess his own language, nor is he required to, since, as the narrator defines it, the copyist's role is merely "an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs,

such as the original drawing up of legal documents" (160). As a scrivener, Bartleby rarely speaks; he works mechanically, functioning as a small cog in the larger machinery of law and society. The situation shifts, however, when Bartleby begins to use "I would prefer not to" as his invariable response to every request. This phrase—barely even an answer—works against its context, subverting the very function it is meant to serve. With each repetition, "I would prefer not to" gains an inexplicable power, becoming increasingly compelling and irresistible. Bartleby's persistent, almost incantatory response subtly permeates the daily language of the narrator and his colleagues. At this point, Bartleby ceases to perform his job as a scrivener—he no longer copies anything. The roles have reversed: Bartleby's words, once mere echoes of legal discourse, now serve as the original, inadvertently echoed by others. In this way, Bartleby ceases to be a mere scrivener, while the other individuals, in a sense, become unwitting copyists of his language.

Given that Bartleby appears to be the least violent and least ambitious character in the story, the question arises: where does his power come from? There is a certain politeness in his words ("would"), and he refrains from bluntly refusing by saying, "I will not do that." In one of their exchanges, the narrator attempts to correct Bartleby's phrasing, but Bartleby insists that it is not "he will not," but rather "he prefers not to": "'I would prefer not to.' 'You will not?' 'I prefer not'" (125). This response neither demands nor expresses desire. However, his apparent politeness is illusory. Bartleby refuses to provide the kind of submissive, socially expected reply, such as "Could you please excuse me from this task because… (and provide an acceptable reason)."

In contrast, Turkey once declines the narrator's request to lighten his workload, justifying his disobedience by claiming his service is indispensable and attributing his mistakes—such as dropping blots—to his old age. He appeals to the narrator's "fellow feeling," reminding him that they are both aging. Like Bartleby, Turkey rejects a request from his superior, but unlike Bartleby, he tries to make his refusal socially acceptable by offering an explanation. Turkey also habitually uses humble language, such as "with submission," in his responses. Clearly, Turkey's refusal still operates within the hierarchical structure of the workplace. This mode of communication proves effective, as the narrator admits that Turkey's appeal to his sense of sympathy is nearly impossible to resist.

As Turkey observes, the word "prefer" is a "queer word" (135). This word subverts the power dynamics inherent in the conversation, transforming the lawyer's somewhat obligatory order into a matter of personal choice. By using "prefer," the speaker positions himself within a discursive space where he appears to have the freedom to make a decision. In this way, the act of speaking itself creates a new, alternative site of utterance. Bartleby's response is deliberately elusive and difficult to interpret—it is neither clearly positive nor negative, since he does not say "I want" or "I do not want." By saying "I would prefer not to," he offers an answer that transcends the conventional responses expected of him in this social and cultural context. This "preference" is ambiguous, as it does not specify what he prefers; rather, it expresses a preference not to do something. As Žižek notes in *The Parallax View*, this form of negation challenges the very nature of preference itself.

> In his refusal of the Master's order, Bartleby does not negate the predicate; rather, he affirms a non-predicate: he does not say that he doesn't want to do it; he says that he prefers (wants) not to do it.[4] This is how we pass from the politics of 'resistance' or 'protestation,' which parasitizes upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position and its negation. (381–82)

[4] Žižek owes this insightful observation to Alenka Zupančič. See his note 82 (p. 429).

Although he uses language to express his refusal, Bartleby's response does not emerge from a conventional site of negation. His preference is not grounded in any reasoning or elaboration, pushing the logic of "preference" to its extreme. As the narrator later acknowledges, Bartleby "was more a man of preferences than assumptions" (138). In this sense, his preference follows no justifications or explanations, but instead subverts the very framework within which preferences are typically understood.

"I would prefer not to" invites multiple interpretations. Bartleby may prefer not to help the narrator proofread the documents, not to be interrupted while copying, not to perform his duties as a scrivener, not to answer questions, not to respond as expected, or not to submit to the authority imposed upon him. However, he refuses to clarify exactly what he prefers not to do. The sentence remains suspended because the object of his preference is left undecided: he might prefer not to do something specific, or, more likely, he simply prefers the "not to" itself. Unlike a typical signifier, which points to something external, "I would prefer not to" repeats itself (much like Bartleby's monotonous work of copying and transcribing), reverberating and spinning in on itself until it ultimately loses all reference.

Speech act theory offers valuable insight into the nature of Bartleby's words as a unique form of signifier. J. L. Austin argues that an utterance does not merely "say" something but performs a specific kind of action—saying something is itself a form of doing. Most of the language used by the lawyer and his scriveners is composed of speech acts. The lawyer's orders and the scriveners' compliant responses are typically aimed at prompting certain actions. But what about Bartleby's language in terms of performative utterances? What is the relationship between the act of saying and the act of doing in his repeated "I would prefer not to"? Branka Arsić explores this performative dimension of language in Melville's writings:

> For if 'to speak' is to do something (as many of Melville's characters and narrators suggest), then speaking is less related to the 'meaning' of words than the very fact that it is an 'activity' of language. By speaking we do not therefore so much do things with words as let the words 'do themselves' as things. (134)

In a sense, the issue is not so much about "how to do things with words," but rather "how words do things themselves." The signifier, in this case, does not serve to designate things or classify the world, because it is not a name that points to specific objects. So, what kind of action does Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" produce? Not much—perhaps nearly nothing. Bartleby's language can thus be seen as a residue left behind after speech has been severed from its meaning and reference, or when the signifier is detached from its signified. Arsić explores the essential detachment in Bartleby's language as follows:

> … there is speaking, but speech does not 'act,' and so language for its part remains enclosed in itself, somewhat like a private language. Language itself is now turned into a passive being, even though it continues to speak. This is not only to say that it does not refer to anything outside itself but that it has lost the capacity to refer to itself. (141)

Bartleby's non-referential language creates a separation between words and actions. "I would prefer not to" disconnects words from things by turning itself into an object—an utterance that becomes a thing in itself. In doing so, it nullifies all reference and particularity. As the narrator observes, "Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable" (109), including his speech. Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" occupies a unique space: always suspended, always in repose, and always distanced. It generates a vacuum, a void within the linguistic realm.

The Politics of Refusal

The old lawyer observes, "[n]othing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance" (123), yet Bartleby's repeated refrain, "I would prefer not to," transcends mere passivity. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri identify Bartleby as a key figure embodying "the absoluteness of the refusal" to authority (203). His refusal achieves its absoluteness precisely because it is so "indefinite." Throughout the story, Bartleby's motives remain elusive, and his actions defy interpretation. He is obstinate and unyielding, yet neither violent nor emotionally charged. He harms no one and reveals no discernible human emotion or desire. Instead, he remains impassive, "a fixture" in the lawyer's office, occupying a corner and mechanically repeating his five-word statement (136). While working, he writes with mechanical precision, devoid of agency or intention, as though detached from any sense of self or purpose.

It is precisely this absence of typical human traits that shields Bartleby from immediate violence. As the narrator reflects,

> I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience, or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been anything ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. (120)

Had Bartleby exhibited the traits of rudeness, impatience, or disrespect, the lawyer would likely have responded with force, either through physical violence or, at the very least, violent language, in order to reassert his authority. As the narrator confesses, "With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence" (121). However, Bartleby's dispassionate, almost non-human demeanor compels the narrator to grapple with his refusal in its purest, most elemental form, devoid of the emotional triggers that would otherwise provoke a more conventional response.

Hardt and Negri contend that Bartleby's refusal represents "the beginning of liberatory politics," suggesting that his absolute negation points to a possibility of creating a new social order. In their reading, Bartleby's physical death in the story becomes a tragic symbol of the limits of pure negation—his existence, they argue, "hangs on the edge of an abyss" and "continuously treads on the verge of suicide" (204). For them, Bartleby's refusal is not a final gesture but a beginning. After refusal, they claim, comes the necessity of constructing a new social body, a positive project that extends beyond mere rejection. In this sense, Bartleby's act can be interpreted as either a hopeful or tragic precursor to a new form of community, depending on whether his refusal leads to self-destruction or sparks the creation of a new world.

However, this interpretation arguably misapprehends the essential nature of Bartleby's refusal. Bartleby's gesture does not simply stand as the negation of something else, nor does it open the door to a new and liberatory social order. Rather, his refusal represents a pure form of negativity that does not propose a dialectical alternative but instead refuses all meaning, representation, and resolution.

In both Hardt/Negri and Žižek's readings, Bartleby stands for negativity, what lies differently is "the role of negativity" in the "models of resistance and refusal." As Kevin Attell's puts it,

> Bartleby, for Hardt and Negri, does not make it to the last stage because he is stuck in negativity—he *is* negativity—for which there is no clear place in the immanent collective praxis of the multitude, which has more or less overcome the dialectic and entered into a new

> absolute space that … would be postpolitical. But for Zizek, not only is this beatific vision symptomatic of a current line of leftist thinking that, he argues, is animated by a tacit acceptance of the victory of capital and renunciation of oppositional (that is, class) politics, but it implicitly operates on an immanentist ontology of an absolute that has purified itself of the negative.
>
> By contrast, Zizek argues for an ontology of irreducible negativity, the fundamental level of which, in Zizek's Lacanian terminology, is called the 'Real,' which he glosses as 'not the inaccessible Thing, but the *gap* which prevents our access to it, the 'rock' of the antagonism which distorts our view of the perceived object through a partial perspective… the very gap, passage, which separates one perspective from another, the gap (in this case: social antagonism) which makes the two perspective radically *incommensurable*.' (220) [5]

In this sense, Bartleby's refusal does not become the opposite of what it negates, but instead operates as an empty space—a gap, a void. As Deleuze observes, Bartleby's refusal is "a negativism beyond all negation" (71).

Bartleby's repeated refrain—"I would prefer not to"—becomes, in this light, an act of pure signification that disrupts the very act of signifying. His words, in their repetitive simplicity, hollow out their own content. They do not serve as a rejection of any specific authority, order, or set of expectations, nor do they demand that something else take their place. Rather, they create a space of resistance to meaning, becoming what Žižek calls a "signifier-turned-object" (385) in *The Parallax View*—a linguistic object that disrupts the symbolic order by refusing to function as a meaningful unit within that order. The significance of Bartleby's words lies not in their opposition to something else but in their refusal to be subsumed into the economy of meaning altogether.

In a sense, Bartleby's words, "I would prefer not to," become like the dead letters he once handled—documents that are written but that fail to reach their intended destination.

These letters lack meaning or intention, mirroring how Bartleby's words resist carrying any clear messages or being translated into action or interpretation. Like the dead letters, they defy authoritative meaning and the framework of rational discourse.

The key to understanding Bartleby's refusal lies in its absolute indeterminacy. His refusal does not simply negate one form of authority in favor of another; rather, it embodies a withdrawal from the very process of signification and representation itself. Bartleby does not provide us with a clear rationale for his actions, nor does he invest his refusal with any emotional depth or moral conviction. His "I would prefer not to" is not a reasoned argument but a pure act of non-engagement, a refusal to participate in the system of communication, work, or institutional life that the narrator represents.

Bartleby's refusal, therefore, functions not as a critique that leads to clarity or resolution but as a radical disruption of the structures of power and language. In the face of this disruption, the narrator, and by extension the reader, are forced to confront the inherent limitations of their own interpretative frameworks. Bartleby's words are empty of content, and his refusal offers no clear moral or political direction. Instead, his act serves as a profound commentary on the incapacity of language and institutional structures to fully capture or control human subjectivity. The final act of Bartleby's death, far from signaling the conclusion of a liberatory project, underscores the tragic impossibility of finding resolution within the framework of language and institutional life. Bartleby's refusal does

[5] Žižek, *The Parallex View*, 281. Emphases in original. For an in-depth discussion of Hardt and Negri's versus Žižek's interpretations of "Bartleby," refer to Kevin Attell's "Language and Labor, Silence and Stasis: Bartleby Among the Philosophers" (2013).

not open up a new horizon of possibility; it simply reveals the profound limitations of the systems that attempt to control or interpret him.

In conclusion, to interpret Bartleby's refusal as the beginning of a liberatory politics or as a precursor to a new social order risks misunderstanding the depth of his act. His refusal is not a step toward something new but an exploration of the limits of meaning, language, and institutional authority. His refusal is not a call for liberation but a reminder of the existential void that lies at the heart of communication and social existence. In this way, Bartleby's act remains an enduring mystery—an enigmatic refusal that resists interpretation and disrupts the very foundations of meaning, language, and power.

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Ideological Prolongation of Space in *Good Bye Lenin!*

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Abstract

Wolfgang Becker's film *Goodbye Lenin* (2003) is set at the centre of big changes after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. At the fulcrum there is an East Berlin mother Christiane, a devout communist, who has a heart attack just before the big changes take place in East Germany. She remains in a coma for eight months. When she wakes up, doctors warn that she needs to have a peaceful life, and she should not get excited about anything, otherwise she would have another heart attack. Then, her children pretend that the GDR still exists, the wall has never come down in order to protect their mother from any kinds of excitement. they restore an isolated inner space, in order not only to maintain the socialist past within the present, but also to lengthen their mother's life. The shift is not only in ideological space, but also in private and public spaces. This paper analyses *Goodbye Lenin* in terms of private and public space, and argue how individualised body space empowers both ideology and personal life to prolong ideology.

Keywords: *Good Bye Lenin, ideology, space, socialism, capitalism*

Introduction

In the late 1980s, glasnost and perestroika marked the beginning of a historical process that led to the Soviet Union's collapse, which gradually caused the disintegration of what was then called the Eastern Bloc in Europe. DDR, also commonly known as East Germany, was not an exception. The Berlin Wall, built to divide Berlin into two after the secession of Soviet-controlled northeastern regions of Germany which was to be included among the socialist regimes remotely controlled by the Soviet Union after WWII, stood out, in Michael Meyer's words, as the "concrete symbol of communism" and its largely loathed rule in Europe for three decades between 1961 and 1989 (Meyer, 2009, p. 21). When the wall, as an iconic image of "misery, oppression, struggle and hope", came down; history came to an epic turning point that ended not only the five-decade-long division between east and west, but also the Cold War, uniting the East Germans with their western fellow countrymen (Meyer, 2009, p. 31, 61).

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Fall of the Iron Curtain

It is important to remember the causes of those changes which, at the time, seemed to be sudden but had had a long process of economic and cultural background. Brian McNair argues that Soviet Union was also facing, as the Brezhnev administration was nearing its end, "the potentially dislocating affects" of the global information age during which the "western leaders" were effectively using globalized networks of information to carry out "propaganda warfare" towards the demise of Soviet policies (McNair, 1991, p. 43). Yet, the destructive effects on Soviet regime did not only originate from the West. Those who studied the Soviet Union's collapse and its half-century long influence in the western capitalist world identified several reasons for that disintegration. Vladislav M. Zubok points out, among these causes, "the superiority" of US and its Cold War policies as the first; "Gorbachev's glasnost" that had degraded communism as the second; the implosion of Soviet economy as the third; "national independence" movements within the Soviet republics as the fourth; and finally, opposition to Gorbachev's reforms by the Soviet elites (Zubok, 2021, p. 33). McNair claims that, as opposed to criticisms by Soviet elites against Gorbachev's reforms, the primary purpose of glasnost had been "to restore the balance between the 'positive' and 'critical' dimensions" proposed by Lenin (McNair, 1991, p. 44).

In a sense, Gorbachev's glasnost could be said to have been suggested as the restoration of Lenin's ideological targets. Zubok refers to Gorbachev's historic policy of transparency and openness, which suggested a relaxation in the country's harshly oppressive and closed-circuit communist rule, as one of the major causes that invited media attacks "on the communist past and ideology" contributing to "the rise of anti-communist and nationalist movements" (Zubok, 2021, p. 34). This process led to, in Zubok's words, an "explosive spread of ideological anti-communism and American-style liberalism" (2021, p. 45)

On the other hand, Gorbachev also aimed to "revise the ideological orthodoxy" by seeking about radical reforms named as "perestroika" (Zubok, 2021, p. 68), which raised doubts about the future of communism rather than reforming the regime. Gorbachev's vision was intensely supported by the Western European and American leaders in order to justify western criticisms against communist regimes. These reforms, intended by Gorbachev for the betterment and welfare of the Soviet nation, caused the triumph of the West over the Soviet Union paving the way to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The "domino-effect of communist regimes in Eastern Europe" caused by the wall's fall changed the geopolitical conditions in Europe (Zubok, 2021, p. 210). Certainly, it was not only the reforms introduced by Gorbachev that brought the end of an era labelled as the Cold War, but also, as McNair proposes, "foreign intervention" and "internal subversion" together with the "economic collapse" (1991, p. 75) reinforced by global liberal economy that had influenced the world since the early 1980s.

Amid the Changes: Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!*

Amid these political changes, there were certainly cultural reflections of these historical transformations of social conditions. Novels, films and plays were produced in order to reflect the influence of this period on individual lives. Wolfgang Becker's film *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003) is one of these films set at the centre of these global changes after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The film deals with the fact that the turn from state socialism to capitalism led to significant reformations not only in the lives of East German population but in the Westerners as well. At the fulcrum, there is an East Berlin mother Christiane, a devout communist, who has a heart attack just before the big changes take place in East

Germany. She remains in a coma for eight months. When she wakes up, doctors warn that she needs to have a peaceful life, and she should, under no circumstances, get excited about anything, otherwise she would have another heart attack, which she would probably not survive.

Among the scholars who studies the film, Roger Hillman considers *Good Bye Lenin!* as a contextual reference to cultural memory that not only survives but is also "transfigured by the difficulties of the unification process" within the history of GDR in which the myths and the truth "were so intertwined" (Hillman, 2006, p. 224). Hillman reads the film as the prolongation of the history of former GDR like many others including Timothy Barney who argues that the film is a nostalgic longing for the old GDR in Christiane's children's attempts to recreate the old days' "authenticity" within a "consensus" in the collective memory (2006, p. 132,133). On a deeper level, argues James McAdams, the story of the film is not about Christian, but about Alex who, like everybody else around him does, "has lost no time in shedding his East German identity" and during his mother's coma, dresses himself in Western clothes, imitates "the corrupting influences" of western music types and degenerate art (McAdams, 2020, p. 33). In the beginning of Alex's experience of new life introduced by the collapse of the Wall, one cannot talk about a nostalgic longing for the old socialist days until he realizes the defects of consumerist culture.

Good Bye Lenin!, while centring on the historical changes generated by the collapse of socialism in 1989, also follows the transformation of state socialism to capitalism that caused important changes in the lives of East German citizens. Christiane, a devout Communist and the mother of Alex and Ariane, brings up her children on her own as her husband left for the West 10 years ago. The actual story starts on the 40th birthday of GDR with depressed and unsatisfied Alex representing at large his generation, rushing into the streets to protest the status quo and marching for unification. Christiane finds herself in the middle of protesters, sees her son attacked and arrested by the police, and collapses immediately. The collapse results in a heart attack following eight months of coma during which everything changes with the collapse of the Berlin wall, East and West unite, capitalism enters the former GDR, and East Germans try to adapt themselves to the new culture. In this respect, Christiane's collapse foreshadows the collapse of the Berlin wall and her sleep during the decay of communism. When she wakes up eight months later, her children are ready to keep her away from any shock. Despite collapse of East Germany and its decay day by day, Christiane keeps her health because she does not realise what is going on.

In the meantime, Berlin Wall falls down and Christiane misses the changes while Alex ventures for the new tastes of a new culture, and travel to west Berlin to visit night clubs and watch erotic shows. Leaving the school of economics, Ariane finds a West German boyfriend, starts working for Burger King and becomes a member of the capitalist system. In a sense, "goodbye Lenin" may be interpreted as "welcome Ronald McDonald" (quotation marks added by the authors of the article). Capitalist life style intrudes in their lives in the form of class enemy and all the members of the family, except Christiane, are enclosed within the new form of living, by throwing all their previous furniture out and buying in new westernized ones.

Alex's attempts to recreate the dying out East German culture are presented as not only a wish to prolong his mother's life in good health, but also to recreate a safer, utopian past. Therefore, he connects the present with the past. Lu Pan argues that "Ostalgie", combining "Ost/east" and "nostalgia" in German, is the best term that describes "the sensitive characteristics of the culture of memory after reunification" (2013, p. 144). The fall of the

wall, the speedy renovation of East Berlin by the removal of Lenin's statue, the advertisements of Western products influenced and accelerated the transformation of private space as well as the public space which welcomed not only new furniture but also new neighbours and even new family members. Lu Pan rightly points out that, although former residential and public buildings of the former socialist rule still stand, they could be covered "with a huge banner of Coca-Cola advertisements" while satellite dishes for TVs are installed in many balconies (2013, p. 145).

Although the premise of the film is based on her children's attempts to prolong Christiane's life, the subtext reveals their struggle to lengthen and idealize socialism for the sake of their mother's health. Prolongation of Christiane's life turns, in the hindsight, into attempts to prolong socialism in their attempts, as Roger Hillman states, by installing ongoing versions of her former life "as if the Wall had not fallen" (2006, p. 222). Alex's struggle to collect empty jars and etiquettes of his mother's favourite pickles brand, which is no longer available in the newly introduced supermarket chains, lead him to fill old empty jars with the new western pickles that his mother finds even more tasty. Roger Hillman parallels Alex's picking attempts to "the 'pickling' of a whole State"; and his "fantastic inventions" create a "life of their own" (2006, p. 222).

With the help of his inquisitive friend Denis who has technical talents in film making, Alex pretends that the GDR still exists, the wall has never come down, and everything is going on as it has always been. In order to protect Christiane from any kind of excitement, they produce videos of fake news about how socialism survives and prevails the world; restore an isolated inner space, detached from all the machinations of capitalism in order not only to lengthen their mother's life, but also to maintain the socialist past within the present. The shift is not only in ideological space, but also in private and public spaces. While the former "socialist" public space becomes more individualised as the people began to reflect their individual choices in their colourful clothes and their choices of lifestyles that invade and cover the former socialist public life; the former private spaces become much more of a public space as a result of the abandoned homes whose interiors are now open to public invasion as new comers from the west begin to settle in the houses abandoned or destroyed by their former owners.

It is useful here to refer to Gerald J. Gruman's hypothesis of "apologism" in longevity of life as an antonym of "meliorism" that suggests an over-optimistic belief in making the world a better place (2003, p. 9). Apologist approaches to the world fashions symbolic attempts to turn the world into a better place through superficial protections of older values in an attempt to believe that the world is not changing and it is still a good place to live in. On the other hand, meliorism is an optimistic suggestion that the world is going to be better than it has ever been. Alex and Denis are in both apologism and meliorism. They are apologetic for the demise of socialism while, on the other hand, they are highly optimistic in their attempts to recreate the socialist past to an extent that they begin to believe in their utopian socialism in their dreams. At the same time, they gradually lose their hopes in bringing back a good life neither to Alex's mother nor to former East Germany.

The individual body, which was once a unit of production in Marxist terms, is now under individualised protection in the form of personal solarium panels and western fashion products introduced into homes by the West Germans. When Christiane's daughter Ariane's West German boyfriend Rainer moves in to live with them before Christiane wakes up, Rainer installs solarium panels inside the flat to sunbathe. This radical individualization stands out as a form of extreme interest in caring one's own body; and

this becomes a symbolic representation of assiduous care in a welfare community in protection of individual body. Naturally, this cannot be observed in socialist household before the fall of the wall, but Christiane's home carefully ordered in socialist humbleness and simplicity is now under western impertinence that lifts personal welfare and comfort over necessities of socialist commonality.

In another study on longevity, John C. Barefoot et al. focuses on the concept of trust as "a characteristic belief that the sincerity, good will, or truthfulness of others can generally be relied upon" in maintaining good health and prolongation of life (1998, p. 518). Alex and Dennis struggle to recreate an environment as trustable as possible for Christiane. Her hopes are revived by the trustfulness of an illusion. However, longevity of re-created socialist space, both public and private, emerges as a means of optimistically lengthening Christiane's life. In terms of private and public sphere, individualised body and space empower both ideology and personal life. It is an endless debate whether or not we should struggle to lengthen our lifespan as long as possible, as Christine Overall claims (2003, p. 1). Overall argues that desires to prolong our lives do not stem from the fear of death, but from the fact that people "value the state of being alive" (2003, p. 24). Christiane also certainly does. Yet, she is known as a woman who values the longevity of her ideals more than she values her own life.

The film opens by foregrounding the symbols of the former German Democratic Republic with the GDR flags all over the walls and the powerful figure of still-standing Lenin statues as yet untouched. Wolfgang Becker significantly puts forward the physical socialist territory of the GDR, which is to be deterritorialized during the film. All iconic figures of socialist ideology such as the statues and portraits of early communist leaders including Lenin and Marx, and the flags carrying the renowned hammer and sickle are removed. It turns into a process of not only the deterritorialization of cultural identities but also the trivialization of ideologies that had been followed by millions. Jennifer Creech states that Becker uses Lenin in order to engage with a "more dialectical understanding of everyday experience in the GDR", especially the conflict between the topic suggestions of socialism and state violence, which, in the beginning of the film, becomes very obvious: "Lenin is associated both with the utopian kernel of the socialist project, and also with the institutions of real existing socialism" (Creech, 2009, p. 112).

On the other hand, national identity, which forcefully used to resist the hegemony of capitalism, begins to disappear and turn into a new identity that brings new habits into their limited interior, such as using home solariums, more colourful furniture instead of the seriously pastel colours of socialist identity. After invading inner space, capitalist system in the form of Americanized products conquers the outer space, therefore the German space is overturned by the American one. Becker parallels unification with capitalism and consumerism. In other terms, unification invites Americanisation and German space is conquered by American consumerism in this image of invasion. Esra Öztürk, who studies the film within the Gramscian concept of hegemony and Marxist concept of alienation, points out that Arianne, Alex's sister becomes alienated by adapting a uniform identity that takes her away from her own self when she starts working for the Burger King, which is an iconic symbol of western consumerism (2020, p. 183).

Harsh capitalism changes the lives of the workers and the labour force in the country has to find new jobs in the new marketing system for the first time. Alex is employed by a Cable company that markets satellite dishes to middle class Germans who have recently turned into consumers. Alex gets used to the new life style still East German but Westernized in a completely different setting, where the outer space is occupied by the

satellite dishes. The walls that once used to bear the GDR flags are now covered by satellite aerials.

In the meantime, East German interiors were left as they were, and deserted by their former socialist inhabitants. They are about to decay and collapse just like the Berlin wall by the powerful dominance of outside Westernization. As Thomas Elsaesser suggests, "the physical territory of the GDR" is occupied by the West Germans in an arrogant manner, but "as a moral territory it is also still occupied by the feelings, memories, faded dreams and dashed hopes of socialist inhabitants" (2007, p. 128).

On the contrary, Christiane's bedroom will be an antithesis of what has been observed. Alex will recreate a new room, yet bearing the remnants of the past. What Alex creates becomes a resistance to the Americanization. He uses the past to keep his mother's health and, thus, past becomes a part of his present life. In a sense, physical Americanisation is still occupied by socialist nostalgia. Their attempts to protect their mother from any kinds of excitement help them restore an isolated inner space, detached from all the machinations of Capitalism in order to maintain the socialist past within the present. Unification, once a utopia, revives utopian dreams of socialism. Alex thinks that his mother's arrival is approaching relentlessly like a Russian tank. This simile brings back home the Soviet socialism which has already collapsed in the exterior space. However, Alex's struggle is not only to keep her mother healthy, but also to come to terms with the problematic condition of the socialist past and recreate utopian present. Joseph F. Jozwiak and Elizabeth Mermann reads Alex's idealist attitude as nostalgic "that functions as a mode of resistance to the Western take-over of power" (2006, p. 790). Although Stuart Hall argues that "the return of the local is often a response to globalization" (1997, p. 33), the illusionary space in this instance becomes a means of resistance to the capitalist power, something more powerful than a response.

At this point, Christiane's reflection is ironic to the extent that she does not realize how isolated and illusionary her interior environment is as opposed to the exterior Americanized space that she is unaware of. Alex re-writes the East German history and blends past, present and future, because this recreated illusion also bears utopian dreams for his future. This coincidence of past and present in the same setting brings a palimpsest into being. Different time periods bearing different cultural codes are built upon each other irreversibly. Thus, the expression of this cultural difference creates problems in perceiving the divisions of past and present. As a result, political differences between past and present also create differences in cultural identity. This is not only a palimpsest of different histories, but also of cultural differences.

To overcome the huge contradictions of quick cultural changes, Alex buys old papers, clothing from the flea market and tries to find pickle jars bearing East German brands. His actions contribute to the resurrecting of GDR in a limited small, interior space. Yet, it is useful here to refer to Jennifer Creech who argues that the narrative strategy of the film is biased heavily on a male perspective. Although it is the mother who is in the centre of the frame story, the narration focuses more on the male protagonists by "positioning the viewer from the very beginning of the film to identify equally" with Alex (Creech, 2009, p. 104). All these attempts appear to be the justification of a son's attachment to his mother, while, on the other hand, Ariane's struggle to establish a new life with her western boyfriend is underrated in the film. Yet, the film does more than that in attracting the audience's attention to the fact that it is not only an Oedipal attachment of Alex to his mother, but it is also an endeavour to unite the family, in parallelism to the unity of the East and the West.

This is the reason why Alex recreates not only his mother's bedroom, "but the entire perceptual field of her former pre-fall-of-the-Wall life" (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 128) by finding pickle jars with the former GDR brand labels on them in the garbage cans and refilling them with imported western products. This fictional life allows a utopian reality "to coexist with the new" as Elsaesser suggests (2005, p. 128). During her birthday party that Alex organised for her by bringing together the former socialist comrades and prearranging school children to sing nationalist GDR songs, Christiane notices that a huge Coca-Cola banner is being hanged on the wall across her bedroom window, on which a gigantic GDR flag celebrating the 40th anniversary was hanged formerly. In this critical scene private space is overwhelmed by the public space. Although Alex controls the inner space from the invasions of outer space, it is continually invaded by the capitalist interventions. The peaceful dreamlike reality of her room is attacked by the outside vulgarity of consumerism.

Upon this, Alex still continues the illusion for her and immediately prepares simulated TV broadcasts with his friend Dennis, and keeps maintaining the disappeared GDR. In these artificial TV news hours which they record on video tapes, Alex finds an explanation for every change in her environment that might be shocking for her. In this film in the film, he uses an illusionary presentation of the facts instead of direct presentation of them. Coca-Cola becomes an East German drink, the formulas of which have been stolen by the gaudy Americans; new arrogant West German inhabitants in the East become refugees fleeing from the merciless reality of the West. Yet, Alex, while wishing her mother to believe in his simulated facts, begins to believe his own version of history.

Yet, the fictional GDR, enclosed in Christiane's small, isolated room yields to the power and domination of the outer space. When Christiane ventures outside one day, she finds the streets full of Western ads and shocked by the flying Lenin statue carried away by a helicopter, symbolising the death of communism. Upon the incident, Alex and his friend Dennis produce a new broadcast reporting that the West is in collapse and Westerners are fleeing to the East. For plausibility they even hire an East German taxi driver who looks like the first East German astronaut.

Conclusion

In *Good Bye Lenin!*, the transition from socialism to capitalism is depicted not just through political and economic changes but also through the transformation of space. The influx of American products and consumer culture into post-reunification Germany signals the dominance of Western capitalism, effectively reshaping public spaces. Director Wolfgang Becker suggests that space is not merely a physical or geographical construct but a fluid and ideological entity that can serve as a site of resistance.

Despite the visible Americanization of public spaces—through advertisements, fast-food chains, and Western commodities—an alternative, imaginary socialist space emerges within the private sphere. This space, however, is not a continuation of actual socialism but rather a nostalgic reconstruction, highlighting the tension between memory and reality. While the characters attempt to preserve a sense of the past within their personal environments, the larger reality is that socialist space is in decline, giving way to the forces of global capitalism.

Irony plays a crucial role in the film's portrayal of this transition. The characters, especially Alex, maintain a deliberate distance from both the socialist past and the capitalist present. By fabricating an illusion of the GDR for his mother, Alex constructs a temporary

resistance against the encroachment of Western consumerism. However, this resistance is ultimately unsustainable, emphasizing the question of whether space is truly dictated by ideological structures, personal beliefs, or the overwhelming force of globalization. The film invites the audience to reflect on the limits of private space as a sanctuary from dominant cultural influences and whether such spaces can ever remain independent in a world shaped by powerful external forces.

In *Good Bye Lenin!*, longevity operates on both a personal and ideological level. On one hand, Alex's elaborate efforts to restore and maintain the familiar socialist environment of his mother's past are intended to protect her fragile health and extend her life. On the other hand, his actions transcend personal concern, evolving into a broader attempt to preserve the ideals of the former East Germany. By reconstructing an imaginary socialist world within the confines of their apartment, Alex not only shelters Christiane from the jarring realities of reunification but also resists the rapid disappearance of the socialist past. His carefully curated version of the GDR is not merely a nostalgic refuge—it becomes a utopian reimagination of what socialism could have been, untainted by its historical failures.

This recreation of space serves as a direct reaction to the encroaching forces of Western capitalism. In transforming their private home into a microcosm of a lost world, Alex resists the imposed consumerist culture that is reshaping public life outside their walls. His actions symbolize a counter-narrative to the dominant ideology, questioning whether the past can be sustained in memory even as it disappears in reality.

The concept of longevity in the film thus extends beyond Christiane's survival. It reflects a deeper struggle to uphold the socialist dream in the face of its collapse, revealing an irony in Alex's efforts: while he fights to keep his mother alive, he simultaneously attempts to breathe life back into an ideology that is already fading. His fabricated version of the GDR becomes a paradox—both a resistance to capitalist transformation and an illusion that cannot endure indefinitely. Ultimately, *Good Bye Lenin!* presents longevity as both a personal and ideological endeavor, showing how memory, resistance, and nostalgia interact in the face of irreversible historical change.

Good Bye Lenin!, that begins as a tragic-comic film about the survival of a mother, is not only a film on the longevity of human life, but also on the longevity of utopian socialism. Familial dreams of unity and welfare are prompted by the unity and welfare of the country which turns into a symbolic representation of the disintegration of a family. The film, therefore, follows the story of the young members of a family that is stuck in the overwhelming atmosphere of the Soviet controlled socialist rule due to their mother's devotion to communism. These young people, who wish to prolong their mother's health, would like a betterment in their life conditions. *Good Bye Lenin!* portrays yet another depression brought by capitalism. This turns the young members of the family towards their utopian dreams of socialism. As a result, survival of the mother becomes a metaphor for surviving in the new system. In a sense, the prolongation of life depends on the prolongation of social welfare. Thus, the prolongation of the mother's health relies on the prolongation of country's past in an allusive reference to the concept of motherland.

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Boppe, eine ungewohnte und beachtenswerte Stimme aus dem späten 13. Jahrhundert: Sozialkritik, ökonomischer Wandel, Mäzenatentum und Tugendlehre im poetischen Gewand

Albrecht Classen[1]

Abstract

Der Blick auf bisher wenig beachtete Dichter des späten 13. Jahrhunderts, als Konrad von Würzburg ganz die literarische Szene zu beherrschen schien, lohnt sich durchaus, wenn man ihre Texte genauer auf die Aussagen hin abklopft und die Überlegungen in Betracht zieht, die dort formuliert worden sind. Dieser Beitrag bemüht sich darum, speziell das Werk des südwestdeutschen Dichters Boppe neu zu beurteilen und darauf hin zu überprüfen, ob nicht innovative Gedanken und Vorstellungen, die sich allenthalben in seinen Strophen finden, es rechtfertigen wenn nicht gar erfordern, unser Bild vom Spätmittelalter um einiges zu modifizieren. Boppe mag nicht zur allerersten Garnitur seiner Generation gehört haben, aber wir können eine Reihe von sehr bemerkenswerten Aussagen identifizieren, die uns ermutigen, diesen Dichter stärker ins Augenlicht zu rücken und als einen eigenständigen Poeten anzuerkennen, der idiosynkratisch und gedankentief didaktische und ethische Überlegungen anstellte, was wir von vielen seiner literarischen Zeitgenossen nicht unbedingt behaupten können.

Schlüsselwörter: *Sangspruchdichtung, Boppe, Ethik, Gottesvertrauen, Geld*

Abstract

This study examines the largely overlooked 13th-century poet Boppe and reevaluates his contribution to the tradition of Sangspruchdichtung. While contemporaries such as Konrad von Würzburg dominated the literary scene, Boppe's verses contain strikingly original reflections on social, ethical, and economic issues. The article investigates how themes such as social criticism, economic transformation, virtue, and trust in God are interwoven into his poetry. One of the most notable aspects of his work is the juxtaposition of chivalric ideals with the realities of financial necessity, thus foreshadowing the increasing role of money in medieval society. At the same time, Boppe stresses the indispensability of divine grace, emphasizing that worldly knowledge, strength, or even happiness is meaningless without God's support. His moral reflections highlight generosity, discipline, and the protection of widows and orphans, while criticizing pride, vice, and social decay. Furthermore, his references to various European and Mediterranean regions reveal not only his broad geographic awareness but also the political and cultural horizons of his age. Unlike the traditional Minnesang, his Sangsprüche are more didactic,

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critical, and individualistic. This paper ultimately argues that Boppe should not be dismissed as a minor or epigonal figure but recognized as a distinct poetic voice who mirrored the socio-cultural transformations of his time. In doing so, the study invites a reconsideration of late medieval literature and the potential significance of other underestimated poets of the period.

Keywords: *Late Medieval German Literature, Sangspruchdichtung, Social Criticism, Patronage, Courtly Culture*

Extend Abstract

Boppe, an unusual and noteworthy voice from the late 13th century: social critique, economic change, patronage, and moral teaching in poetic guise

This article explores the life and works of Boppe, a late 13th-century German poet, whose literary contributions have often been neglected or dismissed as epigonal in comparison to more prominent contemporaries such as Konrad von Würzburg. The study argues that Boppe, though not belonging to the "first rank" of his generation, nonetheless provides original insights into the social, economic, and moral issues of his time. By reevaluating his Sangsprüche, the article seeks to reposition Boppe within the broader framework of medieval literary history and highlight his relevance to the understanding of late medieval thought.

Although traditional scholarship has focused primarily on canonical poets such as Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassburg, or Walther von der Vogelweide, Boppe's verses offer a unique didactic and ethical dimension. His works are characterized not merely by repetition of established themes but by the introduction of new perspectives. Through a careful reading of his poems, this study demonstrates that Boppe's voice is one of social critique and moral reflection, which makes him stand out among less innovative contemporaries.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Boppe's poetry lies in his confrontation of chivalric ideals with economic reality. In one of his verses, he enumerates the many qualities and accomplishments expected of a knight—loyalty, generosity, artistic and literary skills, hunting, weaponry, even musical and intellectual pursuits. Yet, he concludes with a striking observation: without money, all of these virtues are meaningless. This bold claim anticipates the gradual erosion of feudal values and the emergence of money as a decisive factor in shaping social status. In this sense, Boppe can be regarded as a pioneering poet who explicitly recognized the socio-economic foundations of courtly life.

Another recurring theme in Boppe's work is the assertion that human power, wisdom, and achievements are futile without divine grace. Drawing inspiration from Walther von der Vogelweide yet offering his own perspective, Boppe emphasizes that neither wealth, nor strength, nor even a thousand years of happiness would suffice without God's favor. This view reflects the deep religiosity of the late Middle Ages and frames human striving for knowledge and mastery of the world within a theological horizon. In doing so, Boppe underscores the human yearning for universal knowledge—curiositas—while simultaneously warning against hubris without spiritual grounding.

Virtues, Morality, and Didactic Purpose

Boppe's verses often function as moral instruction. He extols virtues such as generosity, loyalty, and chastity while condemning greed, pride, and unchastity. He warns against arrogance and self-glorification, urging individuals to value humility and recognition of

others. His admonitions extend to rulers and knights, whom he calls upon to protect widows and orphans, uphold peace, and preserve the moral order of society. By addressing both individual ethics and collective responsibility, Boppe's poetry transcends mere moralizing and becomes a reflection on the ethical foundations of late medieval life.

A striking feature of Boppe's poetry is his broad geographical knowledge. In several stanzas, he references rulers and regions from across Europe and the Mediterranean—Hungary, France, England, Russia, Egypt, Morocco, Portugal, Lithuania, and beyond. Such references function as more than ornamental details; they suggest a poet engaged with the wider political and cultural landscape of his time. Moreover, his comments on patronage, praising the margraves of Baden and Bern while lamenting the lack of support from other courts, reveal the intricate relationship between poetry, patronage, and power in the late 13th century.

Boppe departs significantly from the tradition of Minnesang, which largely emphasized romantic and courtly love. Instead, his poetry is marked by didacticism, individual reflection, and social critique. He experiments with allegories, riddles, lists, and contrasts, creating a poetic style that is simultaneously traditional and innovative. By blending moral instruction with acute observations of social and economic change, Boppe carved out a distinct space for himself in medieval literature.

The study concludes that while Boppe may not reach the literary heights of the canonical poets of his era, his contributions should not be underestimated. His poetry reveals a keen awareness of the ethical decay, social transformations, and emerging economic realities of late medieval society. His verses provide valuable evidence of how individuals at the time grappled with questions of morality, wealth, divine authority, and human ambition. By recognizing Boppe as more than a derivative or marginal poet, this study challenges conventional narratives of literary history and opens new perspectives for further exploration of overlooked authors.

Ultimately, Boppe emerges as a remarkable and noteworthy voice of the late 13th century, one who merits greater scholarly attention for his critical insights and his role in articulating the tensions of a society in transition. His poetry not only enriches our understanding of medieval literary culture but also highlights the value of revisiting marginalized figures who may hold the key to a more comprehensive view of medieval thought.

Einleitung

Einerseits schwindet das generelle Interesse an der Literatur der Vormoderne, andererseits entwickelt sich die Forschung zunehmend und greift jetzt auch auf Texte, Autoren, Genres, und historische Epochen zurück, die bisher oftmals eher im Schatten geblieben sind. Der Höhenkamm um 1200 dominiert zwar weiterhin überaus stark, so als ob die nachfolgenden Epochen weniger wertvoll gewesen wären, machte sich ja angeblich anschließend ein Epigonentum breit, das es an Innovationskraft, Kreativität und Ausdrucksfähigkeit ermangeln ließ. Dennoch hat es in den letzten fünf bis sechs Jahrzehnten immer wieder interessante Vorstöße gegeben, die zu Neuentdeckungen und veränderten Perspektiven geführt haben, wie der Fall von Oswald von Wolkenstein (ca. 1376/77–1445) eindringlich vor Augen führt, der erst heute als die bedeutendste Stimme des 15. Jahrhunderts angesehen wird. Neben den literarischen Spitzen eröffnen sich oftmals Tieflagen, die wenig bekannt sind, und dies obwohl die germanistische Wissenschaft schon weit mehr als 200 Jahren intensiv am Betrieb ist. Der unablässige Diskurs ist bestimmt von sich wandelnden Interessen und Anliegen, die durchaus politisch, feministisch, ökologisch, oder soziologisch sein können, weswegen dann auch die Auswahlkriterien sich ändern, mittels derer wir literaturhistorische Konzept verfolgen, fallen lassen, neu aufgreifen oder modifizieren. In dem Prozess verschwinden daher so manche Dichter aus dem Blickwinkel, während andere nach langer Zeit erneut unser Interesse erregen können, und dies sowohl in der Literatur des Mittelalters als auch der Moderne.

Gewiss trifft immer wieder zu, dass Dichter auf Vorlagen zurückgegriffen haben, was leicht zu Wiederholungen oder Abflachung in der thematischen Gestaltung geführt haben dürfte. Oder noch radikaler formuliert, aus intertextueller Sicht besteht im Grunde jeder literarische Text aus Elementen, die teils kreative-neuartig anzusehen sind, teils aber ganz gewiss aus einem Schatz an Quellen stammen (Classen, 2025b). Die verschiedensten Literaturgeschichten und eine Menge an gezielten Einzelstudien haben bereits viel Licht auf dieses Phänomen geworfen, was jedoch zugleich weiterhin ein Desideratum darstellt, weil die Masse an vorhandenen Texten so überwältigend wirkt und die Aufmerksamkeit der Forschung trotz vieler Appelle, auch bisher weniger beachtete Werke in Betracht zu ziehen, stets zu den 'klassischen' Dichtern zurückzukehren tendiert (Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Straßburg, Walther von Vogelweide, Wolfram von Eschenbach etc.; cf. die Beiträge zu Toepfer, Hrsg., 2019). Gewiss erweist sich diese Tendenz als verständlich, denn diese zentralen Texte haben sich als komplex, tiefschürfend, aussagekräftig und zeitlos erwiesen und laden stets neu dazu ein, sich mit den dort enthaltenen Aussagen zu beschäftigen. Das Etikett des Epigonentums bedeutet dennoch, dass wir uns freiwillig Scheuklappen anlegen und uns der Aufgabe einer kritischen Sichtung der insgesamt vorhandenen Texte entziehen (vgl. dazu die Beiträge in Chalupa-Albrecht und Wick, Hrsg., 2020; Leppin und Raiser, Hrsg., 2021).

Gewiss trifft ebenfalls zu, dass wir kritischer Kriterien bedürfen, um unseren Weg durch die hochkomplexe Literaturgeschichte zu bahnen. Nur weil ein Text im Mittelalter aufgezeichnet wurde, bedeutet keineswegs, dass er deswegen als literarisch hochwertig anzusehen wäre, wie etwa das extreme Beispiel vom anonymen 'Heldenlied' *Der Wunderer* von ca. 1499 vor Augen führt, wo es schlichtweg an Konsistenz, Sinnhaftigkeit oder Aussagekraft mangelt (Classen, 2016).

Der Sangspruchdichter Boppe

Hier soll, um dieses Phänomen anhand eines speziellen Falles genauer zu studieren, das Werk des spätmittelalterlichen Sangspruchdichters Boppe, posthum oft als 'Meister' bezeichnet, genauer gesichtet werden, denn auch wenn man sich bisher kaum mit seinen Strophen auseinandergesetzt hat, ergeben sich recht viele bemerkenswerte Perspektiven, die zu seiner Neuentdeckung einladen dürften. Immerhin liegt nun eine historisch-kritische Ausgabe seiner Lieder bzw. korrekter seiner 'Sprüche' vor (Alex, Hrsg., 1998), die von einem zufriedenstellenden Apparat begleitet wird (siehe auch Brunner und Wachinger, Hrsg., 1986). Aber abgesehen von kleineren Beiträgen zu Boppe hat man sich bisher kaum weiter mit ihm auseinandergesetzt (cf. die Beiträge zu Hübner und Klein, Hrsg., 2015; ein dürres Datengerüst findet sich z.B. online unter https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boppe; verlässlicher dagegen Malm, 2012). Gewiss erscheint sein Name in diversen Literaturgeschichten und auch online-Enzyklopädien (Classen, 2025a), aber wirklich größere Aufmerksamkeit hat dieser Dichter deswegen trotzdem noch nicht erregt (Bumke, 1990, S. 318), auch wenn die Gattung des Sangspruchs durchaus gründlich durchleuchtet worden ist (Tervooren, 1995). In den relevanten Nachschlagewerken ruht, wenn Boppe überhaupt berücksichtigt wird, der Schwerpunkt auf der Überlieferung seiner Werke in den verschiedenen spätmittelalterlichen Handschriften, auf den von ihm entwickelten Tönen, auf seinen Rang als 'Meister' und auf seinen Erwähnungen verschiedener staufischer Mäzene (Kornrumpf, 1978). Wie aber seine politischen oder religiösen Aussagen zu verstehen wären, gilt weiterhin noch genauer zu untersuchen, bevor wir ihn erneut, wahrscheinlich zu Unrecht, in die Ecke der Epigonen stellen.

Sozialkritische und ethische Reflexionen

Zum Einstieg wende ich mich der Strophe I.30 zu, wo der Dichter einen sehr bemerkenswerten kontrastiven Vergleich anstellt, der radikal die falsche Maske vom Gesicht des traditionellen Rittertums reißt. Einerseits hebt Boppe hervor, welche Tugenden, Fähigkeiten oder welches Ansehen oder welche Bewunderung ein Ritter genießen könne. Andererseits hebt er schockartig hervor, dass all dies keinerlei Wert besitzen würde, wenn der Ritter nicht auch Geld besäße. Schlicht gesagt darf Boppe als einer ersten höfischen Dichter angesehen werden, die sich mit der ökonomischen Realität auseinandersetzten und explizit die Voraussetzungen umschrieben, die eine höfische Existenz überhaupt ermöglichten. Zwar scheint Boppe weitgehend noch im traditionallen aristokratischen Kontext gelebt zu haben, wie sein ganzes Œuvre deutlich vor Augen führt, das er ja dem korrespondierenden Publikum widmete. Aber in dieser Strophe drängt sich zum ersten mal ein ganz neuer Ton nach vorne, denn der Dichter hebt explizit hervor, auf welcher ökonomischen Basis ein ritterliches Leben überhaupt finanziert werden konnte (Busch und Fajen, Hrsg., 2021, 266–269; vgl. allgemein dazu Grubmüller und Stock, Hrsg., 2005; aus historischer Sicht Büttner, 2022).

Betrachten wir uns beide Teile genauer, entdecken wir, wie umfangreich Boppe zunächst den kulturellen, ethischen und moralischen Kontext am Hof ausleuchtet, um dann ganz am Ende all dem einen Strich durch die Rechnung zu ziehen und dies mit der Realität zu konfrontieren. Diese Kontrastierung ist nur möglich, weil er zunächst sehr detailliert und umfangreich aufführt, auf welcher Basis ein Ritter sein Ansehen gewinnen kann. Zunächst sei es notwendig, die traditionellen Werte von „triuwe, milte, stæt in sînen worten" (V. 3) zu realisieren (Ehrismann, 1995). Darüberhinaus aber sei zu erwarten, dass ein Ritter „künde schrîben, lesen, tichten, seitenspil" (V. 4), mithin sich literarische und künsterlich

betätigen fähig sei, abgesehen von den üblichen männlichen Befähigungen zur Jagd oder zum Waffengebrauch (V. 5–7). Sogar die Nekromantie gehöre zu den möglichen intellektuellen Beschäftigungen eines Ritters (V. 8), der selbstverständlich auch musikalisch gebildet sein sollte. Boppe spricht dazu von der Bärenjagd, auf der sich ein angesehener Ritter verstehen solle, was insgesamt dazu führen würde, dass alle Frauen ihm ihre Gunst schenkten.

Zuletzt erwähnt der Dichter auch noch die *Septem Artes*, die dazu führten, dass der Ritter „wîse unde wort" (V. 17) elegant verwenden könne, womit das Bild einer vollständigen Bildung am und für den Hof entsteht. Dann aber verwirft Boppe all dies als nichtig und nutzlos, wenn der Ritter nicht auch über Geld verfügte: „daz wære vil gar an im verloren, hætte er nicht pfenninge" (V. 18). Gewiss missachtet der Sänger nicht die lange Liste von Fähigkeiten und Begabungen eines Ritters (vgl. dazu Bumke, 1986, Bd. 2, S. 416–51, der dies nur als ironische Spitze auffasst), aber er formuliert zugleich die realistische Einsicht, dass all dies sehr kostspielig sei und einer soliden Finanzierung bedürfe. Zwar dominieren all diese höfische Werte und Fähigkeiten, aber sie werden rundum mit einem Schlag sozusagen vom Tisch gefegt, und dies mit nur einem kleinen Hinweis auf die „pfenninge", d.h. auf das liebe Geld, das erst die ganze höfische Kultur ermögliche. Gewiss hütet sich der Dichter davor, tiefer in diese Sachlage einzusteigen, könnte ja dieser kritische Einwand als zu heftige Kritik des angesprochenen Publikums angesehen werden. Aber er hält auch nicht damit zurück, die ökonomische Realität anzusprechen.

Daher verdient diese Strophe wegen der letzten Zeile sehr genaue Berücksichtigung, denn Boppe signalisiert damit zukunftsweisend das Ende der feudalistischen Machtstruktur, weil Geld die Gesellschaft zu beherrschen beginnt, was etwa hundert Jahre später schon Oswald von Wolkenstein in seinem Lied Kl. 25 „Ain burger und ein hofman" explizit zum Ausdruck bringt, wo der enttäuschte Ritter mit Gewalt auf das Urteil der alten Kupplerin reagiert, die ihm nicht ohne Bezahlung das Recht auf die Prostituierte zusprechen will, während der Bürger mittels seines Geldes schlicht und einfach seinen Gegner aussticht (Wachinger, Hrsg., 2015; cf. Classen 2000; id. 2001). Salopp ausgedrückt formuliert Boppe einerseits, wie wunderschön all diese höfischen Ideale und Begabungen seien, die sicherlich dem Ritter die Liebe aller Frauen eintragen würde, doch ohne Geld seien sie alle wertlos.

Zwar findet sich diese Erkenntnis nur ganz am Ende von 28 Versen, aber da die Strophe konditionell gestaltet ist, mit „Ob in vünf landen ûzerwünscher wære ein helt" (V. 1), hängt alles von der letzten Zeile ab: „daz wære vil gar an im verloren" (V. 28). Der Dichter gibt uns also viel zu denken und warnt seine Gesellschaft unverblümt davor, dass die alte Maske des höfischen Lebens nicht mehr tauglich sei, weil das Geld im übertragenen Sinne bereits an die Tür klopft und sein Recht beansprucht, das es bis heute im 21. Jahrhundert nicht aufgegeben hat. Wie im Sprichwort formuliert er gewissermaßen, ‚Geld regiert die Welt'.

In seiner ersten Strophe (I.1) bediente sich Boppe bereits des gleichen Modells, ein kontrastives Schema zu entwickeln, das konditional bestimmt ist. Hier aber besteht die Spannung einerseits zwischen materiellem Reichtum und andererseits der Gnade Gottes, d.h. zwischen der physischen Welt und der Spiritualität. Zunächst entwirft der Dichter die Möglichkeit, dass ein Mensch – hier nicht genauer sozial bestimmt – über alle Macht und Kraft verfügen könne, die es ihm erlauben würde, selbst die Unendlichkeit von Sandkörnern am Meer zu erfassen bzw. tausend Riesen zu besiegen. Weiterhin imaginiert er die Situation, dass diese Person in der Lage sei, Berge und Felsen zum Einstürzen zu bringen und die gesamte Welt zu beherrschen. Und wenn dies noch nicht genug wäre, stellt er sich vor, dass dieses Individuum eine vollkommen glückliche Ehe für tausend Jahre führen könne – „nâch wunsche wære ein wîp in êren wunnen, / kiusche unde reine, wol

gezogen, der schœn ein übergulde" (V. 14–15). Trotzdem sei all dies, so unglaublich es auch scheine, völlig nutzlos, wenn es nicht durch die Gnade Gottes überhöht oder gestützt werde.

Die Anleihe an Walthers von der Vogelweide berühmten Ersten Reichsspruch, „Ich saz ûf eime steine" (L. 8,4; Bein, Hrsg., Nr. 2) ist unverkennbar, denn auch dort hatte der Dichter bereits hervorgehoben, dass drei Dinge im Leben des Menschen praktisch unvereinbar seien, nur zwei von ihnen könnten gut zusammenpassen, nämlich Geld, Ehre und die Gnade Gottes. Allerdings hatte Walther dann betont, dass, wenn Friede und Recht in der Gesellschaft etabliert werden könnten, das Dilemma überwindbar wäre, weil ja dann die öffentlichen Bedingungen geschaffen seien, auch die geistigen Werte zu erringen und sie mit den materiellen Gütern zu verbinden. Boppe griff zwar auf Walthers Vorlage zurück, aber seine poetische oder religiöse Ausage verfolgt doch andere Gedanken, die darauf zielen, dass ohne die Gunst Gottes absolut nichts von Wert wäre. Weder physische Kraft noch unendliche Erkenntnisfähigkeit, weder die Fähigkeit, über die ganze Welt zu herrschen noch das Glück, eine vollkommene Ehe zu führen würden ausreichen, ein sinnvolles und gutes Leben zu führen.

Abgesehen von dieser religiösen Botschaft enthält diese Strophe noch eine Reihe von anderen Schwerpunkten, die auf das allgemeine Streben des Menschen hinzielen, wie man entweder vollkommene Erkenntnis der Welt bis in die kleinsten Elemente hinein gewinnen kann, einschließlich der vier Elemente – „wazzer, luft, viur, erde" (V. 11) – , oder wie man die tiefsten erotischen Freuden in der Ehe zu erwerben vermag. Zuletzt verweist der Dichter sogar noch auf das Element der Zeit – „leben tûsent jâr" (V. 17) – , doch unterwirft er alles vollkommen der Macht Gottes, denn ohne seine „hulde" (V. 18) sei alles zweck- und sinnlos. Gewiss repräsentiert diese Strophe keine absolut innovativen Gedanken, sie spiegelt aber, was für sich genommen sicherlich von großem Wert für uns ist, von welchem Drang nach Wissen die Menschen auch schon des 13. Jahrhunderts erfüllt gewesen waren, und dies insbesondere zu einer Zeit, als die großen Naturphilosophen wie Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–1280) und Konrad von Megenberg (1309–1374) stark ihre naturwissenschaftlichen Bestrebungen vorantrieben, ohne jedoch bereits neuzeitliche Erkenntnisse zu gewinnen (vgl. dazu etwa die Beiträge zu Heidelberger und Thiessen, Hrsg., 1981). Es geht darum, dass Boppe klar ausspricht, welche Neugier die Menschen beherrscht (die viel diskutierte *curiositas*), die aber ohne eine religiöse Fundierung zu keinem Ziel führen würde. Immerhin gibt der Dichter dabei zu erkennen, wie klar ihm bewusst ist, welches Streben nach totalem Wissen über die gesamte Welt, ja das Universum, die Menschen bereits erfüllt. Gewiss trifft zu, dass wir Boppe als einen konservativ denkenden Dichter identifizieren müssen, der vor der menschlichen Hybris warnt, aber allein schon seine Aussagen über diese Sehnsucht nach vollständiger Kontrolle über das Universum verrät, wie stark sich im späten 13. Jahrhundert die Einstellung des Menschen zur physischen Dimension gewandelt hatte, die es laut der Meinung vieler Individuen komplett zu durchdringen und womöglich sogar zu beherrschen galt.

Ehre und Moral

In mehreren längeren Strophen idealisiert der Dichter bestimmte Tugenden und Laster, so die *milte*, also die Freigebigkeit (Nr. I.3), und so den Geiz (Nr. I.4). Hinsichtlich der *milte* betont Boppe, dass diese wahre Liebe erzeuge, Freude unter den Menschen schaffe, positive Werte hervorbringe, ganz gleich an welche Individuen man denke. Insbesondere trage Freigebigkeit dazu bei, „diu milte wirdet menschen muot" (V. 11), d.h., sie diene

dazu, den Charakter zu fördern und die menschlichen Beziehungen zu verbesseren, womit ein Gemeinschaftssinn entstehen würde: „diu milte liutert herzen vluot" (V. 13; reinige den Herzensfluss). Genau das selbe Anliegen kommt in „Barmunge, dâst ein tugent, diu dir wol, mensche, zimt" (I.17), aber der Dichter steigert dort den Wert dieser Tugend so stark, dass sie als die innere Kraft Gottes angesehen wird: „barmunge schuof daz mit ir mugent, / daz got dich ûz der hellen porten zuckete" V. 13–14).

Ins Politische gewendet sind solche Strophen wie „Swelch hôhe vürste nû hât hôhes küniges namen" (Nr. I.9), wo der Dichter eine globale Herrschaftslehre fast wie einen „Fürstenspiegel" entwickelt, doch zugleich andere Aspekte einfließen lässt. Es geht darum, wie sich ein Fürst Ansehen erwerben könne. Er würde dafür „lîp unde muot, êre und wirde und werden gamen" (V. 2; Kraft, Gesinnung, Ruhm, Würde und edle Heiterkeit) gewinnen, aber er bedürfe dafür ebenfalls gute Krieger, die ihn treu und kraftvoll unterstützen würden, wie dies bereits im Fall der „Störren" (V. 18) gewesen sei. Hierbei handelt es sich um einen literarischen Bezug auf das Heldenepos *Kudrun* (ca. 1260), wo der Anführer Wate, der mächtigste Mann am Hof der Hilde, also der Mutter Kudruns, von seinen Stormarn unterstützt wird (Alex, Hrsg., S. 128).

Als viel interessanter erweist sich dagegen die lange Liste von Herrschern aus ganz Europa und im Mittelmeerraum, auf die das genauso zutreffen würde, ob in Ungarn, Frankreich, Schottland, England, Russland, Bulgarien, Ägypten, Marrokko, Portugal oder Litauen. Boppe erweist sich damit also durchaus gut belesener Mann, der über beträchtliche geographische Kenntnisse verfügte, die er hier jedoch nur spielerisch einsetzte, um mental eine Weltkarte zu entwerfen. Diese aber diente ihm vor allem dazu, universale Erkenntnisse über einen guten Herrscher zu formulieren, denn dieser könne zwar über große Macht und hohes Ansehen verfügen, aber wenn er sich nicht auf vertrauensvolle Helfer verlassen könne, würde ihm dies alles nichts nützen.

Ins Religiöse gewendet appelliert der Dichter in der Strophe I.10 an Gott, der sich bereits unendlich viel dem Menschen gewidmet und sogar geopfert habe, dass dieser seinen Engeln den Auftrag erteilen solle, sich der Welt zuzuwenden und den Bewohnern helfend beiseite zu stehen. Das gleiche gilt für die Strophe I.11, während in I.12 der Priesterstand als der würdigste in der Gesellschaft beschrieben wird, denn Priester hätten mehr religiöse Autorität als die weltlichen Fürsten und seien von Gott dazu begnadet, die Hosti zu Christ Leib zu verwandeln. In I.13 singt der Dichter ein Preislied auf den Menschen, der die Würde Gottes zu empfangen berechtigt sei, womit er auch komplette Autorität über alle Elemente oder Wesen in der Natur besitze, was wir natürlich heute, die wir uns im Anthropozän befinden, nicht mehr so sehen würden, was aber eine andere Thematik darstellt. Als bedeutend hingegen erweist sich hier eine erneute Liste von Nationen einschließlich der Italiener, Slawen, Ungarn, Dänen oder Deutschen, die alle die Gnade Gottes zu empfangen berechtigt seien (V. 2–3).

Ähnlich wie in früheren Strophen wendet sich Boppe in I.15 dem Ritter zu und appelliert an ihn, die traditionellen Werte hochzuhalten, was indirekt als Kritik am Verfall des ganzen Standes aufgefasst werden könnte. Vor allem solle der Ritter darauf bedacht sein, Frieden allenthalben zu pflegen und seine Autorität so einzusetzen, dass kein sozialer Missstand auftrete. Dazu gehöre insbesondere, Witwen und Waisen zu beschützen, seinen eigenen Ruhm hochzuhalten und nach den traditionellen höfischen Werten zu trachten: „milte, kiusche, triuwe und schame mit êren [...]" (V. 15). Zwar bleiben die Aussagen recht vage und sehr vorsichtig, aber die Warnung vor dem Verlust der ritterlichen Ideale ist doch deutlich vernehmbar: „und lâ dich nicht an êren vinden heisen" (V. 10).

Als äußerst ungewöhnlich erweist sich „Hæt ich des Küniges Salomônes wîsheit ganz" (I.18), wo der Dichter erneut eine konditionale Situation entwirft und diese dann mit dem deutlichen Gegensatz abschließt. Es geht um den höchsten Wert im menschlichen Leben, erotische Liebe zu erfahren: „hie vür næme ich, daz sich mîn liep gegen mir lieplîch versunne" (V. 18; ich hüte mich davor, dass ich mich gegen die Liebe versündigen würde). Im Kontrast dazu stehen die Weisheit König Salomons, die Schönheit Absalons, die Macht von König David, die Stärke Samsons, der Besitz von allem Goldschmuck, die Klugheit Aristoteles' und die magischen Fähigkeiten Vergils, die erotische Attraktivität des Helden Guraz, die Tugenden Senecas und die Schnelligkeit Asahels. All dies stellt der Sänger hintan, um die Liebe zu seiner Dame als das Wertvollste im Leben zu identifizieren.

Äußerst ungewöhnlich, jedenfalls im Vergleich mit dem traditionellen Minnesang und der gnomischen Dichtung, wirkt die Strophe „Swaz hôher vürsten, herren hât des Rînes vluz" (I.20), wo der Dichter darüber klagt, dass viele Fürsten ihm keine finanzielle Unterstützung gewähren würden, nur der „von Baden unde ouch von Berne, dem alten und dem jungen" (V. 18) hätten sich als großzügige Mäzene erwiesen, d.h. der Markgraf Rudolf I. (gest. 1288) und dessen Sohn Hermann VII. von Baden (gest. 1291) (Bumke, 1979, S. 254). Einerseits ist damit die Thematik völlig eindeutig, andererseits nützte der Dichter zugleich die Situation aus, um einen Blick quer durch die deutschen Lande zu werfen und hervorzuheben, wo sich bedeutendere Höfe befinden, wo er ebenfalls Unterstützung hätte finden können und sollen: „swaz ir hât Hollant, Brâbant, Flandern unde Krein, / Wettelant, Westerîch, der Karste und Orrein, / Frîôl, Stîre, Kernt und Ôsterrîche" (V. 4–6). Dies setzt er dann noch fort, indem er noch auf Franken, Südtirol, Thüringen, Sachsen, Meißen, Wetterau, Hessen, Westfalen, Böhmen und Polen hinweist, womit ganz unvermutet eine politisch-kulturelle Karte entsteht, auf die sich Boppe mäzenatisch verstanden selbst lokalisiert und dann doch distanziert, denn überall dort treten keine Gönner auf: „sus bin ich von ir aller helfe leider gar verdrungen" (V. 15).

In „Wære ein ritter turnei, strîte, tjost sô wol gelart" (I.22) kehrt der Dichter zurück zu seiner früheren Thematik, seine Zuhörer vor Laster zu warnen. Hier handelt es sich um die Gefahr der Prahlerei, die den Schuldigen schnell all seines Ansehens berauben würde. Eine Person, die sich durch besondere Fähigkeiten auszeichnete, sollte nicht die anderen missachten und ihnen ebenfalls Anerkennung gewähren, womit er seine Tugend öffentlich beweisen würde: „ein kunster solte den anderen loben, alsam der werfer tæte" (V. 15). Angeberei würde sogar denjenigen schaden, der über besondere Qualitäten und Werte verfüge: „ruom hœnet manigen, der sus kunst und prîs wol an im hæte" (V. 18). Durchaus ähnlich in der inneren Aussage ist die Strophe „Comêta, swie der gebende sî sô liechten schîn" (I.26) gestaltet, wo der Dichter das Wesen des Kometen mit einem Menschen vergleicht. Das Leuchten des Kometen rühre nicht von ihm selbst her, sondern erweise sich bei genauerer Betrachtung als verursacht von einer anderen Quelle, die hier nicht benannt wird, aber wohl als die Sonne zu verstehen wäre. Wenn der Komet am Himmel auftrete, dann würde das Katastrophen und Not, Krieg und Hungerleiden ankündigen. So schön also der Komet beim ersten Anblick erscheine, würde er sich dann doch als eine furchtbare Täuschung erweisen, was der Dichter dann auf den unredlichen Menschen anwendet, der nur äußerlich („zuo sehene", V. 18) attraktiv wirke, in Wirklichkeit aber von Lastern erfüllt sei: „doch dâ bî ist valschaft ûz und innen" (V. 18).

Immer wieder tritt Boppe als Sozialkritiker auf, der vor Täuschung, Illusion, Verfehlungen moralischer und ethischer Art warnt, sich aber wohlweislich davor hütet, seine Kritik explizit werden zu lassen. Charakteristisch ist dafür die folgende Strophe (I.27), in der er stark darauf pocht, dass junge Menschen „zucht" (V. 1) erwerben müssen, was als innere

Selbstdisziplinierung, Ausbildung, Ehre, Beherrschung etc. zu umschreiben wäre. Wer diesen inneren Wert gut ausbilden könne, würde von Frauen angesehen und geschätzt werden und könnte eine gute Beziehung mit Gott entwickeln: „zuo himmelrîche got, dem süezen reinen" (V. 8). Paralle zu dem früheren Fall folgt dann in I.28 eine Strophe, in der die Konsequenzen von Unzucht beschrieben werden: „unzucht, wo auch immer du dich findest, / bist du auf der Erde eine beschämende Not" (V. 13–14). Aber Boppe beweist sich hier zugleich als ein guter Menschenpsychologe, denn so sehr er auch die Gefahren der Unzucht uns vor Augen hält, so preist er doch zugleich denjenigen, der sich vor ihr hüten könne, als eine begnadete Person, die Gott für die Gnade danken solle, sie vor diesem Laster bewahrt zu haben. Der „sælic man" (V. 17) gehöre somit zu den wenigen Auserwählten, während die meisten sich nur mit Mühe vor der Unzucht bewahren könnten. Der Didaktiker hier preist zwar stark den Wert der *zuht*, ist sich aber sehr wohl bewusst, dass das Ideal nur schwer zu erreichen ist, weswegen er seine Strophe diesem Thema widmete.

Schlussfolgerungen

Boppe verfasste noch eine ganze Reihe anderer Sangsprüche, in denen er Rätsel formulierte, über das Problem mit Läusen spottete, einen König Karl verehrte, den Priesterstand in den höchsten Tönen lobte, die Mutter Gottes pries, die Bedeutsamkeit von Treue schlechthin lobte und andere Aspekte ethischer und moralischer Art hervorhob. Man wird wohl kaum Boppe als einen der besten Dichter seiner Zeit bezeichnen wollen, aber die kritische Sichtung seiner Strophen hat leicht vor Augen geführt, dass er viele brennende Themen seiner Zeit klar zu erkennen vermochte und seine persönliche Meinung darüber äußerte.

Seine soziale Kritik am Verfall der gesellschaftlichen Normen und Sitten kommt mehrfach deutlich zum Ausdruck, aber bewahrte eine vorsichtige Distanz, wohl um nicht seine Zuhörer zu verprellen und seinen eigenen Status am Hofe zu gefährden. In vielerlei Hinsicht können wir Boppe dafür schätzen, wichtige Anliegen und Sorgen seiner Zeit erkannt und literarisch aufgegriffen zu haben. Als didaktischer Dichter verdient er daher durchaus unsere Anerkennung, auch wenn wir seine Strophen nicht zugleich als die Höhepunkte der Literaturszene bezeichnen würden.

Die genauere Betrachtung seiner Sangsprüche zeigte an, dass sich hier ein beachtenswert kritischer Beobachter seiner Gesellschaft zu Worte meldete und sensibel die negativen Folgen des sozialen Wandels Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts ansprach. Wir können nicht erwarten, in seinen Strophen genauere Analysen der Gründe für den Verfall an Ethik und Moral zu erhalten, aber überall erkennen wir in ihm einen Dichter, der mit vielen neuen rhetorischen und thematischen Elementen operierte und damit ein eigenständiges poetisches Profil für sich schuf, das uns dazu ermuntern sollte, in ihm einen würdigen Vertreter des späten dreizehnten Jahrhunderts zu erblicken. Von hier aus sollten wir daher den nächsten Schritt überlegen, wie und auf welche Weise wir die Sangsprüche und Lieder seiner Zeitgenossen wie Ulrich von Winterstetten (ca. 1241–1280) genauer beurteilen sollten.

Es könnten noch so manche lyrische Perlen auf uns warten. In der jüngsten Forschung hat sich sogar in der Hinsicht einiges bewegt, hat man ja mittlerweile auch Dichter wie Burkhard von Hohenfels, Hardegger, Tannhäuser, Winli etc. genauer untersucht (vgl. die Beiträge zu Bulang, Runow und Zimmermann, Hrsg., 2023) und ihre Werke kritisch neuediert wie im Fall von Rumelant von Sachsen (Kern, Hrsg. 2014). Boppe hingegen, als

Sangspruchdichter, wartet weiterhin auf seine Anerkennung seitens der Forschung (vgl. dazu die Beiträge zu Klein, Ehlert und Schmid, Hrsg. 2007; Boppe wird gelegentlich genannt, aber nicht im Detail berücksichtigt). Wir können ihn jedoch dafür anerkennen, neue Perspektiven auf das Leben am Hof entwickelt zu haben, neue kartographische Weltsichten für seine ethischen Gedanken einzusetzen und interessante poetische Kontraste für Tugenden und Untugenden zu instrumentalisieren. Seine Kritik am ethischen Verfall des höfischen Lebens klingt zwar traditionell, aber seine Sprüche enthalten hierbei starke Ausdrücke, die seine persönliche Betroffenheit gut zur Sprache bringen. Dazu experimentierte er recht geschickt mit Tierallegorien, Rätseln, der Form des Priamel und beachtenswerten Listen von Ländern und Fürstentümern.

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