ABERDEEN
HISTORICAL
REVIEW

Volume 2 Issue 1

The University of Aberdeen

July 2023

Editorial Board
2022-2023

For all correspondence, please contact the Editorial Board at info@abdnhistory.co.uk.

Letter From the Editors

We are excited to introduce the second volume of the *Aberdeen Historical Review (AHR)*. Since the first publication in September 2021, the *AHR* has welcomed over 450 readers, and we hope to continue this growth with the release of the newest issue. Maintaining the *Review's* pledge for open-access publishing, all issues will be available on our website (https://abdnhistory.co.uk/published-issues).

The Aberdeen Historical Review began in February 2021 amid the second semester of online teaching when a group of students from the university came together to discuss how they missed the uplifting atmosphere created by being on campus. As a result, the *Review* was established to celebrate the successes of Aberdeen University's students and continue to inspire academic accomplishments throughout the period of the pandemic. Today, we are grateful campus has returned to normal, however, it remains just as crucial to continue celebrating the student body's achievements, which *AHR* aims to support.

The *AHR* is an open-access academic undergraduate journal which publishes first-class scholarship produced by students at the University of Aberdeen. Each paper was written for a History Honours course at the university and thoroughly peer-reviewed by a dedicated board of students. Authors and reviewers partake in an anonymised dialogue, through which authors are challenged to review and develop their papers. In this way, the essays are given the opportunity to reach their greatest potential. Simultaneously, peer reviewers are enabled to take a unique approach to each paper and utilise their creativity, critical thinking, and academic writing skills in advising the author on improvements.

Although the *AHR* is part of a global network of undergraduate publications it is primarily intended as a tool for its community in Aberdeen. It is our hope that students from across the year groups will use the *AHR* as a guiding voice as they write their assessments. This volume includes the course number and title for which each essay is produced, allowing students and tutors alike to refer to first-class essays from a specific history course.

Producing the third issue of the AHR has been a rewarding experience but we could not have achieved this without the support of our faculty advisors Dr Bradford Bow and Dr Owen Walsh. We are thrilled to introduce essays from long-established as well as newer courses across the history department.

Gabriela Hernandez-Lugo opens our second volume with a historiographical discussion surrounding the construction of the modern "state" and the dangers of applying modern terminology to the medieval and early modern periods. Following this, Halle Sim's essay focuses on the works of the Aztec-era writer Fernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc and the subsequent attention he has received from scholars. Similarly, Declan H. Fourrier's essay further explores the use of literature as a form of historical source by investigating the writings of Jane Austen. Katherine McGhee takes us to mid-twentieth century America as she examines the influence of different types of visual culture on Black Protest. Closely following this theme, Hannah Lewis's essay explores the power of photography, specifically focusing on the lynching of Emmett Till during the Civil Rights Movement.

Eilidh Shrimpton's essay takes us back to the early modern period where she investigates the impact of emotion within kirk discipline in Scotland. Further, Kieran Hutchinson examines whether the Fenian Dynamite Campaign that took place between 1881 and 1885 was successful or not. Kristen Nicolson focuses on brings President Abraham Lincoln's historical reputation as the "Great Emancipator" and considers how far this is warranted. Cerwyss McKay's essay examines the misconceptions and realities surrounding the symbolism of the Islamic veil across the Middle East throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Concluding this volume, Jude Christison offers a comparative insight into the experiences of nurses across the Eastern and Western fronts during the First World War through several memoirs.

We would like to thank everyone that was involved in helping create the second volume of the *AHR*. Specifically, we wish to thank our peer reviewers who were crucial in the editing process and all the student authors who submitted their essays to the journal. We were honoured to work with many talented and dedicated undergraduate students who now embark on new paths within academia and beyond. Finally, thank you to the readers for supporting us, we hope you enjoy reading the journal as much as we enjoyed making it.

Your Editors

Table of Contents

The Enigmatic Construct of Modern States in Medieval and Early Modern Historiographies

GABRIELA HERNANDEZ-LUGO

Gabriela Hernandez-Lugo is a fourth-year Joint Honours History and Art History student. Throughout her time at the university, Gabriela has volunteered for the Special Collections department, and she was Social Media Officer for the Art History Society from 2021 to 2022. Her interests are in Renaissance and Early Modern art, as well as dress history. Upon graduation, she will continue with her education at The Warburg Institute pursuing a Master of Art in Art History, Curatorship, and Renaissance Culture.[1]

In his 1970 publication *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Joseph Strayer claimed that the "state" existed "chiefly in the hearts and minds of its people."[2] While it is not the most reliable historical approach to recognise the modern states of medieval and early modern Europe, this definition demonstrates the struggle emanating from twentieth and twenty-first-century historians faced with defining the origins of the political state in European history. On one side of the spectrum, French historian Bernard Guenée bluntly affirmed that "there were states in the West in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries" which were struck by a wave of effective democracy and capitalism.[3] On the other side, Joseph Strayer claimed that the warfare and economic disasters of the fourteenth century and fifteenth century scarcely encouraged political innovation and set back the process of state-building.[4] Two different perspectives amongst a plethora of historical arguments and theories. However, all historians writing on this subject, if not the majority, unanimously acknowledge the dangerous consequences of applying modern terminology, such as that of "state", to the medieval and early modern period.

As described in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, the twenty-eighth definition of "state" refers to "a particular form of polity or government" which overlooks a body of people occupying a defined territory.[5] The source's earliest example of the word in use is by David Strakley in 1536, stating in his *Crown and Country: A History of England Through the Monarchy* that "There ys

---

[1] This essay was written for HI356J: Thinking History.
[2] J. R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, 1970), p. 5.
[3] B. Guenée, *State and Ruler in Later Medieval Europe*, trans. J. Vale (New York, 1985), p. 208.
[4] Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins,* pp. 57-9.
[5] R. E. Allen, et al. (eds), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed. (Oxford, 1990), p. 554.

the veray and true commyn wele; ther ys the most prosperouse and perfayt state, that in any cuntry, cyte, or towne, by pollycy and wysdom, may be stablyschyd and set."[6] It seems evident from this example that there is a conscious understanding of centralised power associated with the term "state" by the early modern period. However, the term becomes more obstructed the further historians move back in history; before its modern association with polities, "state" was used exclusively to describe a condition or state of being. Instead, words such as *lond* or *erd* in Middle English would have been used to describe a general piece of land, a territory, a country, or a kingdom. *The Peterborough Chronicles* is an exemplary instance of this term usage when recounting the tale of William II of England, "He waes swide strang and rede ofer his land and maenn."[7] The chronicler most likely meant the land that belonged to the kingdom, rather than referencing King William's personal land. The broad definitions of centralized powers described by medieval chronicles hinder the efforts of historians to understand how medieval and early modern citizens defined their own governments through primary sources. Alternatively, historians are left with little option but to create modern approaches using structural methods, like that of feudalism, to try and understand the diverse economic, political, and social circumstances of both these periods. Despite the efforts of medieval and early modern historians, the culprit that has brought confusion and chaos to historiographies is the current structural approaches which oversimplify, disregard, and falsely classify the change, adaptation, and diversity within the periods in question.

Not only has the origins of state formation been vaguely researched past the fourteenth century, but the domination of twentieth-century theories on the feudalist system as a default for medieval European societies created false and oversimplified historiographies. Belgian medievalist François Louis Ganshof publish *Qu'est-ce Que la Féodalité?* in 1944 as an effort to define feudalism through military and legal elements; a term that had been in use since the early modern period, but had no concise modern definitions. In his introduction, he boldly claimed that the feudalist system "was that of western Europe in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, with attributes that were not difficult to define".[8] However, he then explains to the reader that in summary, he was to only focus on territories between "the Loire and the Rhine" due to their location as being a territory of the former Carolingian Empire,

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] C. Clark (ed.), *The Peterborough Chronicle, 1070-1154,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1970), p. 27.

[8] F.L. Ganshof, *Feudalism* (London, 1952), p. XV.

and therefore, were attributed with the origins of true feudalism. One of the striking inconsistencies in his argument is the purposeful disregard for pivotal feudal societies of England and Scotland due to "lack of time". He is inadvertently suggesting that the approximate eight hundred kilometres of land between the Loire and the Rhine could be used as a blueprint to then explain every other medieval modern state in Western Europe during a span of three hundred years.

This misconception of a homogenous continent was found to be defective when compared to late-twentieth-century research methods. In Elizabeth Brown's essay, she argues that the "variety of definitions of feudalism and the limitations imposed on their relevance [were] confusing" due to the lack of checks — and balances — on the specific factors that historians were using to classify medieval states of society as feudal or non-feudal.[9] For example, while some historians advocated for the private exercise of public government authority as an essential component of a feudalistic state, Ganshof rejected the idea altogether. Other historians such as Strayer, believed that previous definitions of a true feudalist polity were insufficient, and the feudal history could not be examined without adding additional factors of military and political history. In short, Brown bluntly and unapologetically calls for the entire concept to be deposed. It is worth noting that when referring to the modern convention of the Carolingian Empire in her essay, as if from academic instinct, Brown alternates empire for "state". In context, at the height of the early medieval period, the Carolingian Empire encompassed approximately 1,112,000 kilometres squared of land within what is modern-day France, Italy, and Germany. It contained a population as high as ten to twenty million people.[10] When Brown's criteria are applied against her own statement, it seems that classifying this large territory as a solid state of central power neglects the tumultuous history of divided kingdoms and the internal struggles that lead to civil wars, unstable reigns, and ultimately the downfall of a divided empire by the ninth century.

Even so, Brown's deconstructive argument is echoed fervently in Susan Reynolds' book *Fiefs and Vassals.* Reynolds claimed that "one of the chief troubles with most discussions of Feudalism... is

---

[9] E. Brown, 'Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe', *The American Historical Review,* 79 (1974), 1063–1088, p. 1075.

[10] M. McCormick, 'Where do Trading Towns Come From? Early Medieval Venice and the Northern Emporia', in J. Henning (ed.), *The Heirs of the Roman West* (Berlin & New York, 2007), pp. 44–68, p. 50.

that they tend to confuse words, concepts, and phenomena."[11] In her defence, she breaks down the post-medieval concept and phenomena of the word "fief", a normal translation from Middle English words such as *feodum, feudum*, or *fevum*. In summary, an isolated word does not produce meaning, but the true meaning only reveals itself when the word is used in context and within a sentence. As aforementioned in the introduction, the same can be done with the concept of "state"; its original compared to its modern definition and the phenomena that live on through the historiographies — the medieval modern state. In practicality, and as both Brown and Reynolds argue, the history itself confirms that there was never a clear standard practice to characterize the feudal societies as developed "states". Ultimately, to conceptualize the past by using concepts such as "states", the early historiographies harboured undetected inaccuracies and unchecked historical approaches.

Referring back to Joseph Strayer's quote on defining a state as "chiefly [existing] in the hearts of its people", raises a debate about whether using national identity as an element to define medieval and early modern statehood is an effective approach. It is said that at the Battle of the Standard, David I led an ethnically-diverse army made up of "Normans, Germans, English, Northumbrians and Cumbrians, men of Teviotdale and Lothian, Galwegians, and Scots".[12] After the Norman Conquest of 1066, the Scottish territory would transform itself in ways unimaginable to modern understanding. In the next century, not only did Scotland become a melting pot of diversity, but it also established institutions of royal government such as sheriffs, chamberlains, and justiciars, developed a common law, and saw a growth in accounting and revenue all before the fourteenth century. It is worth noting that Scotland did not legally define its territory until the signing of the Treaty of York in 1237 when both Scottish and English kingdoms defined their Anglo-Scottish border. This did not include the debatable lands of Berwick-upon-Tweed, which will be examined in the subsequent paragraph. Therefore, if the "state" itself had not been formed previous to the early thirteenth century, would it not be inaccurate to define it as such without the legal evidence to support the argument? This debate is highly contested, but as historian Alice Taylor states, the term is adopted so that readers can "understand better how power and political form worked in one particular kingdom to work towards a more nuanced understanding of

---

[11] S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (New York, 1994), p. 12.
[12] M. Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 2011), p. 51.

medieval statehood."[13] The only issue to emanate from this historiography is that even though Taylor has a thoroughly researched argument with clear evidence, she neglects to describe how the application of specific legislation was accepted, or rejected, in the Highlands or Isles where government policies would be naturally weaker due to the distance between the regions. One of the only instances in which the Highlands are mentioned is when describing the appearance of *dabaig* (the unit measurement of land assessment in Scotland), which was thought to have been a system only used in the Lowlands.[14]

By textbook definition, Scotland would be an ideal representation of the medieval modern state, if not for its unique "hybrid kingdom". As T. C. Smout best describes, it was a rift between the Highland society, which "was based on kinship modified by feudalism" and the Lowland society, which was based on "feudalism tempered by kinship".[15] Even though the records might show the homogeneity of the Scottish state, it does not suggest that all persons within the "hybrid kingdom" would adhere to the same system. The Melrose Chronicle demonstrates how national identity was crucial in cementing Scotland as a "state" by Strayer's definition. During the early thirteenth century, the monks of Melrose Abbey, situated at the southern limit between Scotland and England, considered themselves English subjects in English territory. By the middle of the thirteenth century, they still considered themselves English subjects, but now living in Scottish territory. Finally, by the end of the thirteenth century, they regarded themselves as Scottish citizens living within an expanded kingdom of Scotland.[16]

Many historiographies mirror Taylor's neglect of the Scottish Highlands due to the distance and low population of the region; however, the definition of the Scottish "state" would be incomplete and misleading if western and Highland history was omitted. In 1914, Evan Barron placed the burden of the Wars of Independence on the feet of the Gael-speaking regions of the north and west due to their racial and linguistic animosity towards their English counterparts. This approach was accepted for many decades until G. W. S. Barrow noted the inaccuracies behind using cultural and linguistic affiliations as

---

[13] A. Taylor, *The Shape of the State in Medieval Scotland, 1124-1290* (Oxford, 2016), p. 2.
[14] Ibid., p. 94.
[15] T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (Glasgow, 1972).
[16] S. Broadman, 'A People Divided? Language, History and Anglo-Scottish Conflict in the Work of Andrew Wyntoun', in B. Smith (ed.), *Ireland and the English World in the Late Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 112-29.

a factor to measure political attitudes.[17] This is just one of the many instances that demonstrate the various interpretations that were accepted by scholars until modern research disproved their arguments. Even though Joseph Strayer's previous statement on identity might be idealistic, he redeems himself later in his book when summarising that "while the sovereign state of 1300 was stronger than any competing political form, it was still not very strong."[18] His portrayal of the political instability during this period is realistic in the sense that he admits "it took four to five centuries for European states to overcome deficiencies, and to bring lukewarm loyalty up to the white heat of nationalism."[19] Many historiographies paint a prosperous idea of the modern states of the medieval and early modern period, but in reality, as confirmed by Strayer, this was a process marked by trial and error, with states at the mercy of nature, famine, and war; all uncontrollable factors that would hinder any political, economic, or social development.

While the Middle Ages was a period described with uncertainty and associated with the origins of the modern state, the early modern period saw fully developed polities with "a series of agreed, recorded and celebrated institutions and practices [and] constitutional identities which they recognized as distinctive to themselves and which were an important and self-conscious influence on future political and governmental behaviour."[20] From the research, there seems to be a conscious understanding that early modern individuals were better equipped with defining their own "state" compared to their medieval counterparts and as examined in the introduction, the modern definition was also starting to appear in documents and chronicles of this time. However, this by no means suggests there is no possibility for confusion when attempting to tackle the chaotic period that was kicked off by the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Not only that, but evidence of internal state warfare also reaches an all-time high as states fight one another to maintain their status as sovereign polities; this was seen through overlapping jurisdiction and land disputes, conflicts over government, religious reform, etc. A brief acknowledgement of the empire "states" and city-states of Europe, as seen in Italy, were

---

[17] Ibid., p. 112.
[18] Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State,* p. 57.
[19] Ibid.
[20] J. Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 378.

also possible forms of statehood that developed alongside the sovereign modern states of the English, Scottish, and Irish kingdoms, and which add to even more possibilities of confusion.

As previously mentioned, the territorial dispute of Berwick-upon-Tweed during medieval and through to its early modern history serves as an example of how identity does not go hand-in-hand with direct borderlines and depending on the individual could portray a very unique perspective on either the Scottish or English state. The history of Berwick is anything except stable, in the early medieval period, it was part of the Kingdom of Northumbria and by 1018, following the Battle of Carham, it was controlled by the Scottish government.[21] For almost three centuries it was a prominent town in the kingdom and developed strong roots as a successful Scottish port and second only to London in economic importance in medieval Britain.[22] It was not until the Wars of Independence of 1296 that Berwick was captured by the English forces of King Edward I, or as historians call it, the Siege of Berwick.[23] The town would later change overlordship another thirteen times before its last forceful exchange was made in 1482 when it came under English control by force. The uniqueness of the "Debatable Lands" lies with the contested nature of the territory's ownership, which subsequently created a no-mans-land, "where no 'perfect' political community existed [...] and so could not constitute themselves a State."[24] Despite the governments from both kingdoms wishing to keep the land uninhabited due to its instability, citizens had inhabited the land long before the land dispute and not much could be done to forcefully remove them all.

The use of national identity as a form of policy could be seen in 1549 when it was agreed by indenture that the western "Debatable Lands" should be divided between the kingdoms; they allowed the inhabitants a year to relocate to their disengaged state affiliation; the western part was given to the English and the east was given to the Scottish. In the 1840s, Samuel Lewis included Berwick-upon-Tweed in both his England and Scotland *Topographical Dictionary*. By 1885, Berwick-upon-Tweed became part of the county of Northumberland for administrative purposes and was not fully integrated

---

[21] K. Stringer, 'Introduction: "Middle Britain" in Context, c.900–c.1300', in K. Stringer and A. Winchester (eds), *Northern England and Southern Scotland in the Central Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 4.

[22] E. Robson, *The Border Line* (London, 2007), p. 234.

[23] HI2524 Lecture: 'Freedom!': Perceptions of the Wars of Independence'.

[24] S. M. Jack, 'The "Debatable Lands", Terra Nullius, and Natural Law in The Sixteenth Century', *Northern History*, 41, (2004), 289–300, p. 296.

into the county until 1974.[25] The border dispute and modern-day sentiment are varied among the town, and it still resembles the identity crisis that the Berwick inhabitants suffered half a millennium ago. As illustrated by an unofficial referendum carried out by ITV in 2008, it presented 1,182 votes made in favour of becoming Scottish compared to 775 in favour of staying in England.[26] Without taking national identity into account, as most historiographies neglect, Scotland is painted as a progressive society constructing the concept of the modern state as historians live to understand it, it reflects the element of prosperity written throughout Alice Taylor's *The Shape of the State in Medieval Scotland, 1124-1290*. However, once the historian adds the element of linguistic culture and emotion, it paints a far more divided kingdom, striving to adapt to the changing systems trickling in from the continent. This then ties back to Brown's argument that there is no one standard method of classifying territories as "states" and by trying to do so using modern historical constructs, in the end, it damages the authenticity of the historiographies. The Melrose Chronicle and the Debatable Lands go as far as to suggest that the medieval and early modern state did not need to be completely homogenous in culture, religion, or language as some older historians claimed; instead, it was a compromise and acceptance of diversity.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that there are certain problems when using modern constructs to define the medieval and the early modern landscape, not only causing confusion among historians but also for the readers of the historiographies. Firstly, and most importantly, the modern distinction between State and Church which is a commonality for modern states is not in play during these periods of history, that evidence alone shows the confusion that historians face when using modern terminology in order to contextualize the surviving primary sources to their contemporary period. The second analysis made is that the concept of "state" is better suited when applied to early modern history compared to the medieval period which was only just greeting the foundations which flourished through the fifteenth century and beyond. Even though modern research has classified many historiographies as "outdated", publications such as Ganshof's were still effective in guiding historians to find more

---

[25] 'Schedule 1 of The Interpretation Act 1978.' Legislation.gov.uk. Archived from the original on 11 March 2021. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1978/30/schedule/1> [Accessed 21/03/2022].
[26] K. Dawson, 'Berwick-upon-Tweed: English or Scottish?', *BBC News*, 2010 May 01 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/england/8640148.stm> [Accessed 21/03/2022].

accurate historical approaches and the evolvement of various interpretations. If anything, it demonstrates that attention should "be paid to [the] shifting meanings of keywords" and for historians to be allowed to re-evaluate the terminology and word usage of those who lived in the past.[27]

---

[27] Brown, 'Tyranny of a Construct', pp. 1086-7.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Clark, C. (ed.), *The Peterborough Chronicle, 1070-1154,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1970)

Secondary Sources

Allen, R. E. et al. (eds), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed. (Oxford, 1990)

Broadman, S., 'A People Divided? Language, History and Anglo-Scottish Conflict in the Work of Andrew Wyntoun', in B. Smith (ed.), *Ireland and the English World in the Late Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2009)

Brown, E., 'Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe', *The American Historical Review,* 79 (1974), 1063–1088

Dawson, K., 'Berwick-upon-Tweed: English or Scottish?', *BBC News*, 1 May 2010 < http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/england/8640148.stm> [Accessed 21 March 2022]

Ganshof, F. L., *Feudalism* (London, 1952)

Guenée, B., *State and Ruler in Later Medieval Europe*, trans. J. Vale (New York, 1985)

Jack, S. M., 'The "Debatable Lands", Terra Nullius, and Natural Law in The Sixteenth Century', *Northern History*, 41, (2004), 289–300

Lynch, M., *Scotland: a New History* (London, 2011)

McCormick, M., 'Where do Trading Towns Come From? Early Medieval Venice and the Northern Emporia', in J. Henning (ed.), *The Heirs of the Roman West* (Berlin & New York, 2007), pp. 41–68

Reynolds, S., *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (New York, 1994)

Robson, E., *The Border Line* (London, 2007)

'Schedule 1 of The Interpretation Act 1978.' Legislation.gov.uk. Archived from the original on 11 March 2021. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1978/30/schedule/1> [Accessed 21 March 2022]

Smout, T. C., *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (Glasgow, 1972)

Strayer, J. R., *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, 1970)

Stringer, K., 'Introduction: "Middle Britain" in Context, c.900–c.1300', in K. Stringer and A. Winchester (eds), *Northern England and Southern Scotland in the Central Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 1–30

Taylor, A., *The Shape of the State in Medieval Scotland, 1124-1290* (Oxford, 2016)

Watts, J., *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 2009)

An Assessment of the Works of Tezozomoc

HALLE SIM

Halle Sim is a fourth-year Single Honours History student and the layout editor of AHR. She enjoys studying the history of the Ancient World, particularly Ancient Greece and its culture and mythology. Halle pursued this interest in her dissertation which focused on 5th Century B.C.E. Athenian tragedy. She is pursuing a career within the charity sector and currently works with Oxfam.[1]

The historiography of the establishment, growth, and end of the Aztec empire is a study which has been undertaken since the introduction of writing and record-keeping in Aztec society. It has been developed over the centuries as more primary source records are discovered and translated. This has allowed historians to better contextualise and utilise the recorded written history of the Aztec empire to further our understanding of this New World culture. One such example of an Aztec-era writer whose primary source works have defined the historiography of the Aztec world since their publication is Fernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc (c. 1520-1609).[2] Tezozomoc was a Nahuatl interpreter for the Royal Audiencia, a Spanish judicial court found in several districts of the conquered areas of Mesoamerica charged with carrying out royal justice.[3] He was the son of Diego de Alvarado Huanitzin, an Aztec noble and governor of Tenochtitlan from 1539-42, and Francisca de Moctezuma, the daughter of Motecuzoma Xocoyotl ruler of Tenochtitlan from 1502-20.[4] His two most well-known and referenced pieces of literature are *Cronica Mexicana* (1598, written in Spanish) and *Cronica Mexicayotl* (1609, written in Nahuatl).[5]

This essay will begin by exploring the uses of Tezozomoc's works as primary sources utilised by scholars for their own research with a focus on the fields of sociology, anthropology, and history. It will then move on to discussing the various problems associated with Tezozomoc's works. Namely, those raised by scholars and the subsequent arguments presented by other scholars who attempt to

---

[1] This essay was written for HI305M: Aztecs, Mayas and Incas.

[2] D. W. Mcpheeters, 'An Unknown Early Seventeenth-Century Codex of the *Crónica Mexicana* of Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 34 (1954), 506–512, p. 507.

[3] 'Audiencia', Encyclopedia Britannica (2011), https://www.britannica.com/topic/audiencia.

[4] 'Alvarado Tezozomoc, 'Don Hernando (c. 1525–c. 1610)', Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture, https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/alvarado-tezozomoc-don-hernando-c-1525-c-1610.

[5] Mcpheeters, *Cronica Mexicana*, p. 507.

defend his works and their place as invaluable sources of information on the Aztec world pre-Spanish Conquest.

Tezozomoc's first work, *Cronica Mexicana*, is written in the style of European chronicles. It recounts the rise of power and influence of Tenochtitlan and its subsequent fall. His second work, *Cronica Mexicayotl*, is recorded in the form of pre-conquest annals. This source is split into two sections, the first focuses on the establishment of the city of Tenochtitlan and the story of how the Aztecs came to be there, and the second part of the source offers a long list of the rulers of Tenochtitlan and describes the Aztecs relationship with their neighbours. Although it has been widely acknowledged by scholars that Tezozomoc's works are invaluable sources for Aztec history and culture prior to the Spanish Conquest, there are several areas on which scholars disagree on their usefulness and reliability.

Tezozomoc's works contain a broad scope of information regarding the history and culture of the Aztecs pre-Spanish Conquest, this has allowed his information to be used in a variety of fields of study including sociology. The details given of Aztec society in the *Cronicas* shed some light on the existing social structures and the rigidity of class boundaries. There was a system of land and status inheritance in place among the Aztec elite that was similar in idea to those of feudal Europe, as identified by Caso and Wicke who support this claim by providing a quote from *Cronica Mexicana.* Tezozomoc describes inheritance under King Itzcoatl (the fourth king of Tenochtitlan) as "for themselves, their sons, and heirs".[6] Although such a system of inheritance may have been in place for the elite and the select few commoners who were able to move up the social strata, Carrasco notes that according to *Cronica Mexicana* the system of inheritance for the rulers of Tenochtitlan was different and allowed a greater opportunity of social mobility for male members of the ruling family. While still based on familial inheritance, rather than the title passing to the direct heir of the King, there were instead several viable male relatives considered by a council who would then select the one they deemed most suitable to inherit the position of ruler.[7]

---

[6] A. Caso and C. R. Wicke, 'Land Tenure among the Ancient Mexicans', *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 65 (1963), 863–878, p. 868.

[7] P. Carrasco, 'The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Pre-Spanish Background and Colonial Development', *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 63 (1961), 483–497, p. 490.

In *Cronica Mexicana*, Tezozomoc states that after the war with Atzcapotzalco, Itzcoatl awarded his relatives (who were already nobles and thus held some degree of power) with the highest-ranking offices available. Caso and Wicke argue that in doing so Itzcoatl further strengthened the divide between the elite and the commoners, although it must also be noted that under Itzcoatl's reign, some of the newly acquired lands were given to the clans, capullis, and commoners, who had distinguished themselves in battle.[8] This is elaborated on by Carrasco who gives a more detailed description of what a warrior must do to earn recognition for their bravery, taken from *Cronica Mexicana.* Those who have captured at least four prisoners from four of the most formidable enemy cities were given the title *tequiua,* meaning "he who has done a job", and were rewarded with high-ranking official positions most often military-related. Although on the surface this would suggest a more open social mobility between classes, it was still relatively closed. Tezozomoc notes that most warriors who received this level of recognition were nobles and that for the few commoners who were also afforded this title they were still set apart from the nobles as they had to wear different garb.[9] Aztec society was seemingly even further stratified by King Moteuczoma Xocoyotzin (ruled 1502-1520) who, according to *Cronica Mexicana*, decreed that only those of noble blood could enter the palace, which meant that all of the palace attendants must also be of noble blood.[10] Carrasco suggests that lower-born nobles now being relegated to lower-class jobs such as craftsmen, servants and artisans reflects the displacement of the growing noble class and the difficulty of upwards social mobility in Aztec society for most of the population.

Tezozomoc's works are widely used by anthropologists as they offer insight into the culture and relationships between the peoples of the Aztec society. The role that women (specifically noble women in this instance) played in Aztec society is explored by Diel who uses *Cronica Mexicana* to support their observations of the relationship between women and politics. The articles of Diel's that will be discussed pertain to women's role in arranged marriages as a mechanism of political strategy (focusing on the more unusual arranged marriages) and of the representation of women of noble families in the Aztec pictorial history. Tezocomoc's works are not the main point of focus in Diel's works and are only mentioned in passing to provide examples to illustrate their observations. In Diel's article about the

---

[8] Caso and Wicke, 'Land Tenure', p. 867.
[9] Carrasco, 'Civil-Religious Hierarchy', p. 487.
[10] Ibid., p. 490.

representation of Aztec noble women in pictorial history, they note that Malinalxochitl was the sister of their patron deity Huitzilopochtli and was a key female figure in the migration story of the Aztecs (according to *Cronica Mexicana*). Despite this, she is not represented in any further pictorial histories and her legacy only continues through pictorial depictions of her son and granddaughter.[11] Diel uses this example of the lack of representation of an important female figure to give credence to their argument that although noble Aztec women and queens played an integral role in the migration story of the Aztecs, after their representation in this story they tend to be left out from subsequent pictorial accounts.[12]

They also make the argument that despite the lack of representation, women played an important role in the political sphere in the Aztec world in more passive respect, meaning that they were typically only given a political role when it was necessary to achieve something that only women could do.[13] For example, women of noble relation were often used as part of political strategies, particularly relating to subjugation and domination of the competing city-states within the empire by linking them to important figures through an arranged marriage. Diel focuses on four examples of arranged Aztec noble marriages which appear to be unconventional, one of these marriages is mentioned in *Cronica Mexicana*. This is the circa fifteenth-century marriage of Chalchiunhenetzins (either the sister or daughter of Axayacatly, ruler of Tenochtitlan) and Moquihuix (ruler of Tlatelolco). Diel suggests that this marriage of a Tlatelolco ruler to a woman of the Tenochtitlan royal family served to further reinforce the position of Tlatelolco as a subordinate city-state and that this caused increased aggressions within the marriage. These tensions reached a critical point when Chalchiunhenetzins revealed to her family that she was suffering extreme physical abuse at the hands of her husband, including him inserting his entire forearm into her vulva. In *Cronica Mexicana* the abuse of Chalchiunhenetzins sparks the start of a war between Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan, with her genitals being referred to as a prophetic symbol signalling the downfall of Tlatelolco. Tezozomoc also records the battle between these two cities and the victory by Tenochtitlan.[14] Diel uses this example by Tezozomoc to argue that although women may not have

---

[11] L. B. Diel., 'Women and Political Power: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Noblewomen in Aztec Pictorial Histories', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 47 (2005), 82–106, p. 96.
[12] Ibid., p. 95.
[13] Ibid., p. 102.
[14] L. B. Diel, 'Till Death do us Part: Unconventional Marriages as Aztec Political Strategy', *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 18 (2007), 259–272, p. 268-9.

always played an active role in politics, they still wielded some degree of power and influence. Their role in these marriages gives more insight into the shifting political climate of the Aztec world than the tales of conquest do.[15]

Another important topic studied by anthropologists is the cultural relevance of cannibalism to Aztec society. Isaac argues that the accounts of cannibalism tend to be very different depending on whether the author was Nahuatl, Mestizo, or Spanish. He offers three different accounts of cannibalism by trickery and analyses the descriptions of these by authors of each type. For the first story of cannibalism by trickery Isaac uses Tezozomoc's account in *Cronica Mexicana* to show the Nahuatl perspective of the relationship between cannibalism and Aztec culture. *Cronica Mexicana* dates this first story to c. 1430 after the successful rebellion of the Tenochca against the Tepaneca empire and the establishment of the Aztec empire. Although they had subdued the other nearby city-states, Xochimilco was resistant and so as a means of provoking them to war, the Aztecs sent women to the market in Xochimilco to sell produce and meats. These were bought and prepared for the lords of Xochimilco, and although at the time of preparing the foods they were animal products, they transformed into human flesh as the lords were eating. Tezozomoc states that the lords were "shocked and frightened" to find out this, but Isaac raises the question as to what exactly caused this reaction. He gives multiple suggestions, but the primary ones are that the lords were either horrified over engaging in cannibalism or that it was the supernatural aspect of the transformation of the food that scared them.[16] There is also an account of the third story in *Cronica Mexicana* but in this version, there is no mention of cannibalism, Diel states that the account of the first story is the only mention of human cannibalism in *Cronica Mexicana.*[17] There is also only one mention of cannibalism in *Cronica Mexicayotl,* and this is just a brief passage noting that before King Axayacatl appointed Huitzillatzin the first ruler of Huitzilopochca, those living there were "people roasters".[18] Diel uses these accounts from Tezozomoc's works to suggest that cannibalism was not a commonplace feature of Aztec society and that this idea was introduced by Spanish authors, and some Mestizos, who wanted to dehumanise the Aztecs. The use of cannibalism

---

[15] Ibid., p. 259.

[16] B. L. Isaac, 'Aztec Cannibalism: Nahua versus Spanish and Mestizo Accounts in the Valley of Mexico Ancient', *Mesoamerica*, 16 (2005), 1–10, p. 2.

[17] Ibid., p. 4.

[18] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

accusations was a common method of racist propaganda employed by early modern Spanish authors, such as Juan Gines de Sepulveda, to further legitimise the Spanish Conquest.

Tezozomoc's works have been widely used by historians to better understand the events that occurred prior to the Spanish conquest. These events include the participation of some of the Aztecs on the side of the Spanish during the conquests. Castañeda makes use of *Cronica Mexicayotl* to provide two examples of Nahuatl nobles that aid the Spanish and are rewarded with titles. Castañeda includes a quote from Tezozomoc about the participation of Don Diego de San Francisco Teheutzquititzin in the Mixton War, in which he indicates that the reason Diego joined this war was as a form of initiation as a new ruler. The quote which suggests this is "he went to wash as a ruler", which alludes to Diego going to war. Castañeda expands on this by stating that this quote is a translation of the Nahuatl term *motlatocapacato* which refers to the ritual practices of a new ruler going to war to capture prisoners for ritual sacrifice.[19] The other example is Don Diego de Mendoza, the governor of Axacuba, who aided the Spanish and was afforded a personal coat of arms for his bravery.[20] Castañeda uses these examples from *Cronica Mexicayotl* to support their argument that a possible reason why Nahuatl nobles were willing to aid the Spanish is that it was the most reliable way of securing the favour and respect of the Spanish, as seen with Mendoza, and also of being allowed to retain hereditary titles and the privileges afforded with them as is the case with Teheutzquititzin whose father was the previous governor of Tenochtitlan and who descended from the royal family.

The *Cronicas* also offer a wealth of information regarding the wars fought during the time of the Aztec empire and the reasons behind them. Hicks actively engages with *Cronica Mexicana* in his article on the fifteenth-century Aztec Flowery Wars. He explains that a flowery war is a war fought where both sides agree to neither win nor lose and are not waged for conquest but for military training.[21] Hicks also notes that some scholars argue that the main function of the flowery wars was to capture prisoners to act as sacrificial victims in times of need. Some argue that the flowery wars between the Triple Alliance and the Transmontane states had a similar origin and that they began due to a need for

---

[19] M. Castañeda De La Paz, 'Central Mexican Indigenous Coats of Arms and the Conquest of Mesoamerica', *Ethnohistory*, 56 (2009), 125–161, p. 142.
[20] Ibid., p. 147.
[21] F. Hicks, '"Flowery War" in Aztec History', *American Ethnologist*, 6 (1979), 87–92, p. 91.

ritual sacrifice to the gods because of the great drought and famine lasting from 1454-1456. However, Hicks disagrees with this argument as not only is there only one Aztec era source which lists this drought as a reason for the wars, by Alva Ixtitlilxochitl, but it also does not refer to these wars as flowery wars or mention if they continued after the drought. This argument is further supported by Hicks's use of *Cronica Mexicana* in which Tezozomoc states that the only people sacrificed during this drought were dwarfs, albinos, hydrocephalus, and hunchbacks with no mention of war prisoners.[22] According to Hicks, Tezozomoc was one of the first to call the wars between the Triple Alliance and the Transmontane states the flowery wars and this was because it was difficult to believe that despite the Alliance having already conquered much of Mesoamerica they were unable to quell a relatively small force of unified city-states in a war spanning from the mid-thirteenth century to the fifteenth century.[23] Hicks suggests that this could be because the wars were a way for the Triple Alliance to hone their military practices and train new warriors. He adds that in the writings of Tapia, one of Cortes' captains, King Moteuczoma II claims that the Alliance could have easily ended the wars but that it primarily offered a convenient way of gaining experience for new warriors without having to send them to far off regions, and that it also served a secondary function of providing sacrificial prisoners.[24] While the part of the statement regarding the training aspect of the wars by Moteuczoma is supported by Tezozomoc, he disagrees on the aspect of human sacrifices and states that war prisoner sacrifices were made using those taken from real wars.[25]

The authorship of *Cronica Mexicayotl* is a topic of debate among historians. There are those such as Schroeder who believe that the evidence suggests that it was not written by Tezozomoc, but rather Chimalpahin and that it was only the introduction that was written by Tezozomoc. This argument against Tezozomoc's involvement in *Cronica Mexicayotl* is taken further by suggesting that the introduction attributed to Tezozomoc was a misplaced appendix in his *Cronica Mexicana.*[26] This is refuted by Peperstraete and Kruell, who instead argue that *Cronica Mexicayotl* is essentially a Nahuatl

---

[22] Ibid., p. 89.
[23] Ibid., p. 88.
[24] Ibid., pp. 88-9.
[25] Ibid., p. 91.
[26] S. Schroeder, 'The Truth about the Crónica Mexicayotl', *Colonial Latin American Review*, 20 (2011), 233–247, pp. 233-5.

translation of *Cronica Mexicana* rather than an entirely separate piece of literature due to the strong similarities between the two works, which they believe suggests that they were both at least partially written by Tezozomoc, if not entirely.[27] Not only do Peperstraete and Kruell argue that Tezozomoc participated in the writing of both *Cronica Mexicana* and *Cronica Mexicayotl*, but they also suggest that *Cronica Mexicana* served as inspiration and a baseline for Diego Duran's *History of the Indies of New Spain*, another primary source of information of the Aztecs and one of the earliest known books written by a Western scholar on Aztec culture and history.

One scholar, in particular, is credited with championing this shift in opinion regarding the authorship of *Cronica Mexicayotl*: Adrian Leon. Leon was able to do so through his analysis of the photostats in the *Paris Codex* which show that Chimalpahin only transcribed a part of the manuscript, rather than being the author of the entire source.[28] A substantial number of scholarly articles take both *Cronica Mexicana* and *Cronica Mexicayotl* to be written by Tezozomoc. This suggests that the overwhelming opinion among academics is that despite the oldest extant manuscript of *Cronica Mexicayotl* being written by Chimalpahin it is still thought to have been originally written by Tezozomac. However, it can be argued that *Cronica Mexicana* is a more reliably attributed source to Tezozomoc as it is very rarely disputed that he was the original author.

Another point of contention among scholars is whether the version of *Cronica Mexicana* that exists today is complete or merely a fragment of the original. Leon argues that although the sixteenth-century manuscript of *Cronica Mexicana* that exists today is numbered as having 112 chapters and 160 leaves (it only has 110 chapters and 158 leaves), this is not due to missing sections. Rather, it is an error because of incorrect labelling on the part of whoever compiled the manuscript as the manuscript does not appear to be unfinished.[29] He notes that there have been suggestions that there is a missing second part of *Cronica Mexicana* which purportedly details the Spanish conquest of the Aztec world. However, Leon suggests that this is incredibly unlikely and that on the off chance that a second part was written and subsequently lost then it has left no clear traces. There is no mention of when it was written as a

---

[27] S. Peperstraete, and G. K. Kruell, 'Determining the Authorship of the Crónica Mexicayotl: Two Hypotheses', *The Americas,* 71 (2014), 315–338, pp. 335-7.

[28] Mcpheeters, *Cronica Mexicana*, p. 508.

[29] Ibid., p. 508.

follow-up to part one, when it was lost and how, or that it even existed in the first place.[30] According to Leon, all the translations and publications of *Cronica Mexicana* by 1954 are based on two versions originating from the eighteenth century. Mexican historian Orozco y Berra states that these versions were produced between 1789 and 1794 during the period of governance of Viceroy Revillagigedo and were based on the version made by Veytia around 1755.[31] As noted by Leon, the general content of the old versions of the manuscripts of *Cronica Mexicana* and *Cronica Mexicayotl* is similar to the more recent versions. While there are relatively few major changes in these versions, there is a discrepancy in some respects such as names and the use of the Nahuatl language, which puts the reliability of most modern versions of these sources into question as these seemingly small changes can have a significant impact on the way the information is interpreted.[32]

The similarities between Duran's *History of the Indies of New Spain* and Tezozomoc's *Cronica Mexicayotl*, as previously noted by Peperstraete and Kruell, are also discussed by Castañeda De La Paz. Castañeda prefaces her comparison of the similarities between the majority of pre-Spanish Aztec written records by acknowledging that this subject has already been covered by other scholars, such as Nicholson. Nicholson provides an explanation for these similarities by suggesting that out of the very few Pre-Spanish Aztec documents that exist, the majority copied passages from one another, sometimes direct and other times paraphrased with new additions, without crediting or acknowledging the source material.[33] This has led to debate over which sources are the original historical records and which are adaptations. As is the case with Duran's and Tezozomoc's works.

In 1945, Barlow suggested that there was a lost document, alphabetical with the inclusion of illustrations, which acted as the original source of information for the majority of Pre-Spanish Aztec documents; he named this hypothetical source *Cronica X.*[34] This hypothesis has been widely accepted by Mesoamericanists.[35] Castañeda provides another explanation for the similarities of these Aztec

---

[30] Ibid., p. 512.

[31] Ibid., p. 510.

[32] Ibid., p. 512.

[33] M. Castañeda de la Paz., 'Codex Azcatitlan and the Work of Torquemada: A Historiographic Puzzle in the Aztec-Mexica Sources', *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal*, 24 (2008), 151–194, p. 156.

[34] Ibid., p. 159.

[35] Ibid., p. 166.

documents in the form of *Codex Y*, this hypothetical codex is argued to be the predecessor of *Cronica X* but in a purely illustrative form.[36] The differences in information regarding the same subject matter between Duran's and Tezozomoc's works are also noted by Castañeda who suggests that these could stem from the authors using different versions of *Cronica X* and *Codex Y*.[37] In contrast to Peperstraete and Kruell who argued that the information in *History of the Indies of New Spain* is taken from *Cronica Mexicayotl*, which would suggest that the general information in both works is the same, Castañeda argues that when writing *Cronica Mexicayotl*, Tezozomoc used information from *Cronica X* which is found in Duran's work but not in *Cronica Mexicana*.[38] This would support the claim that although they both used the same source, the versions they used were different and so the information in each work was not exactly the same. One such example of this is apparent in the descriptions of the migration of the early Aztecs given by Duran and Tezozomoc, although they both mention the same locations (not all sources do) they portray the geographical relationships of these places differently. Thus, this suggests that the two authors worked with different variations of the same information.[39]

Doubts and problems surrounding these primary sources, in this case, Tezozomoc's works, stem not only from their conflicting information with other sources but also from the author themselves. When these sources were written, Tezozomoc's personal agenda, although perhaps not consciously, will have played a part in shaping how the information is portrayed. As the son of the ruler of Tenochtitlan and Ecatepec on his father's side and the grandson of the previous rulers of Tenochtitlan and Ecatepec on his mother's side, Tezozomoc was an Aztec noble of royal lineage. Although his works were written post-Spanish Conquest after which his family still held a role of prominence in Aztec society, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Tezozomoc's family history as rulers of Tenochtitlan played an important part in the content of his writing. For example, his decision to place such a large focus on the history and deeds of the previous rulers of Tenochtitlan and their relation to their tribal god Huitzilopochtli who led the Aztecs to Tenochtitlan.[40] This could have been a way for Tezozomoc to document his family history in a society which was moving farther away from its origins and being assimilated into Spanish

---

[36] Ibid., p. 159.
[37] Ibid., p. 166.
[38] Ibid., p. 164.
[39] Ibid., pp. 167-8.
[40] H. Berlin, 'Crónica Mexicayotl', *Hispanic American Historical Review,* 31 (1951), 479–480, p. 479.

culture, which raises questions regarding the reliability and objectivity of the information recorded. The pro-Aztec bias in Tezozomoc's works is noted by Hicks.[41] However, there is also evidence to suggest that the underlying biases in Tezozomoc's works would have been closer to that of the Spanish as he was a practising Catholic who actively disparaged the Aztec religion and human sacrifice, in addition to referring to Aztec Gods as demons.[42]

In conclusion, although the validity of Tezozomoc's accounts is questioned by scholars, the arguments provided by Adrian Leon are widely accepted and provide evidence to support the attribution of both cronicas to him. Tezozomoc's works have had a profound impact on the study of Aztec culture and society prior to the Spanish conquest. This can be seen in multiple fields including sociology, anthropology, and history where scholars have used Tezozomoc's work both to simply provide examples and substantiate their arguments but also in articles where the scholar has actively engaged with this primary source material as a main focus of their research. The most impactful use of Tezozomoc's work on the understanding of New World cultures is arguably his descriptions of the ruling family and the noble class as this offers a wealth of information to be analysed by different disciplines to further our understanding of Aztec society and culture.

---

[41] Hicks, "'Flowery War'", p. 88.
[42] Isaac, 'Aztec Cannibalism', p. 7.

Bibliography

Secondary Sources

Berlin, H., 'Crónica Mexicayotl', *Hispanic American Historical Review,* 31 (1951), 479–480

'Audiencia', Encyclopedia Britannica (2011) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/audiencia> [Accessed 22 November 2021]

Carrasco, P., 'The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Pre-Spanish Background and Colonial Development', *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 63 (1961), 483–497

Caso, A., and C. R. Wicke, 'Land Tenure among the Ancient Mexicans', *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 65 (1963), 863–878

Castañeda de la Paz, M., 'Codex Azcatitlan and the Work of Torquemada: A Historiographic Puzzle in the Aztec-Mexica Sources', *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal*, 24 (2008), 151–194

_____, 'Central Mexican Indigenous Coats of Arms and the Conquest of Mesoamerica', *Ethnohistory*, 56 (2009), 125–16

Diel, L. B., 'Women and Political Power: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Noblewomen in Aztec Pictorial Histories', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 47 (2005), 82–106

_____, 'Till Death do us Part: Unconventional Marriages as Aztec Political Strategy', *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 18 (2007), 259–272

'Alvarado Tezozomoc, Don Hernando (c. 1525–c. 1610)', Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/alvarado-tezozomoc-don-hernando-c-1525-c-1610> [Accessed 22 November]

Hicks, F., '"Flowery War" in Aztec History', *American Ethnologist*, 6 (1979), 87–92

Isaac, B. L., 'Aztec Cannibalism: Nahua versus Spanish and Mestizo Accounts in the Valley of Mexico Ancient', *Mesoamerica*, 16 (2005), 1–10

Mcpheeters, D. W., 'An Unknown Early Seventeenth-Century Codex of the *Crónica Mexicana* of Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 34 (1954), 506–512

Peperstraete, S., and G. K. Kruell, 'Determining the Authorship of the Crónica Mexicayotl: Two Hypotheses' *The Americas,* 71 (2014), 315–338

Schroeder, S., 'The Truth about the Crónica Mexicayotl', *Colonial Latin American Review*, 20 (2011), 233–247

The Use of Literature as Historical Sources

DECLAN H. FOURRIER

Declan H. Fourrier has recently completed the final year of their joint honours English and History degree. Declan has an interest in medieval and gender history and in the long nineteenth-century. They currently volunteer at Drum Castle in collection care and archives work. After graduating, they intend to pursue a masters in Medieval History at the University of Edinburgh, and undertake a PhD afterwards.[1]

Until recently, the study of history and literature (also named poetics), was not as differentiated as it is today. Aristotle viewed both as rhetorical arts and only during the nineteenth century was the concept of history reformulated along scientific empirical lines. Historians began to impart more value to facts and the importance of documentation while downplaying the fictive and rhetorical elements in their writings. During this time, literature grew as an autonomous field of research. It also concerned itself with reality but used different methods to uncover a version of reality exposing the "hidden experiences and structures of everyday life" which historians could not encounter through their focus on objective truths.[2] However, the objectivity of history was soon challenged; the historian's ideology had a role in their interpretation and representation of events. Yet, when historiographic theory held that only subjective understandings of the past were attainable, historians did not turn towards literary methods, preferring quantitative data to grounds their work.[3] During the twentieth century, most historians kept to the empirical and scientific sides. A few others, starting with Hayden White, incorporated literary theory back into historiography. The distinction between fact and fiction, between literature and history, blurred once again.

Since language itself is part of the fabric of the world human beings inhabit, any historical document, as well as any literary work, could benefit from literary readings to reveal their "deep content" and add to the historical knowledge that can be extracted from them.[4] However, it is not without issues:

---

[1] This essay was written for HI356J: Thinking History.

[2] K. Korhonen, 'General Introduction: The History/Literature Debate', in K. Korhonen (ed.), *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 9–20, p. 10.

[3] J. Nitz, 'History, a Literary Artifact? The Traveling Concept of Narrative in/on Historiographic Discourse', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 15 (2013), 69–85, p. 74.

[4] H. White, 'Historical Discourse and Literary Writing', in K. Korhonen (ed.), *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 25–33, p. 27.

misreading can happen easily, scholars need to be careful about abstraction and generalisations, and the never-ending debate of the potentiality of a text to be representative of its time. Yet, in using literature as a historical source, the historian can discover new possibilities in the past, concerning for instance the lived experiences of the people which are usually hidden or absent from more fact-oriented documents. This essay will discuss the extent to which works of literature can be useful in the pursuit of historical knowledge, with references to the writings of Jane Austen.

Literature is not confined to canonical great texts. In the broadest sense, a literary work is a written piece bearing a sensitivity to its language. Thus, literature is a way of engaging with language creatively to understand and describe the world in alternative representations of the "categories of life, thought, words, and experience."[5] Like any work of art, literary writing is a response to the world in which it has been created. Lloyd Pasco considers "literature as a cultural repository," full of reaction and reflection of the context in which the work was produced.[6] Yet, it is subjective, and cannot be expected to act as a mirror, thus the historian needs to handle it with care to access its reliability and the full range of knowledge present within it.

Although literature is often affiliated with fiction, both terms are not synonymous. But fiction is to be treated with care. It represents and creates imaginary things as real, or poetic inventions, by shaping pre-existing material. "All fiction selects and combines elements from the real world," thus all fiction is meaningful when read against human experiences, and all fiction can be more or less interpreted as an allegory of its world and culture.[7] The reader will be made aware of the fictionality of a text, and neither they nor the historian should take it at face value. Moreover, non-fiction can be deemed literary, for instance, non-fiction novels, or, as in the works of the essayistic tradition where the fiction and non-fiction border is blurred and becomes problematic. Thus, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction cannot determine historical value; both can yield historical knowledge, albeit to answer different questions.

---

[5] L. S. Kramer, 'Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra', in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 97–130, p. 117.

[6] A. H. Pasco, 'Literature as Historical Archive', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), 373–394, p. 374.

[7] Korhonen, 'The History/Literature Debate', p. 17.

One text can also be read in different ways, as a literary work or as a historical document, even while acknowledging its fictional aspect. Jane Austen's realistic novels could be read as sources for contemporary social norms and be compared to etiquette manuals, for instance. Or they could be read as repositories for less explicit subjects: in *Emma*, the representations of health and body also depict attitudes towards it, but some are embedded in the narrative form.[8] The bitter remarks about Mrs Churchill after her death comment on the culture of invalidism but requires the reader to be able sensitive to sarcasm.[9]

History, even though historical writing takes the form of fiction in the way it represents a world that does not exist (anymore), is in search of some kind of truth to understand the world of the past. In the twentieth century, the tendency was to approach this search from a scientific angle. Yet, historical knowledge is closer to literary knowledge in comprehending the world because human beings are more than data. History seeks to access and represent the lived experience of past individuals, then it needs to give proper attention to "the verbal complexity and formal precision" of literature which is, like other art forms, "a sensory embodiment of the truth."[10]

Our rich lived experience can be accessed through art and, particularly, through literature and narratives, which create meaning and cohesion. Content and form, in literature, are meaningful in many ways for the historian. Narrative choices, for instance, hold the conscious and unconscious intentions of the author, and literary theory can help access these different levels of meaning. The content of a text can be used to extract more traditional historical knowledge. However, it can also contain complex symbolic meanings. Because history's "central burden" is "the story of bodily human beings" as "the story of the real," and because those bodies can be accessed through their representations, symbolic meanings carry a layer of reality.[11] Any material phenomenon possesses a symbolic meaning interlinked

---

[8] J. Austen, *Emma* (1816; Oxford, 2003), p. 305.

[9] R. Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London, 1996), p. 140.

[10] C. B. Lacour, 'Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Hegel's 'Truth in Art': Concept, Reference, and History', *ELH*, 59 (1992), 597–623, p. 600.

[11] A. Brett, 'What is Intellectual History Now?', in D. Cannadine (ed.), *What Is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 113–131, p. 126.

with the way we perceive reality. In *Emma*, the naming of watering places and characters' attitudes about it reflects a symbolic class dimension contemporary readers would have understood.[12]

These more or less complex symbolic meanings, as well as their constant movement (they are never truly fixed), actually expands the levels of reality the historian can have access to and give them a multi-dimensional approach to culture when combined with other historical sources.[13] It is not merely what people did that is represented, but how they felt about it. Austen's novels echoed a popularly recognisable truth, already attested by contemporaries who, like Walter Scott, perceived in them the "dimension of internal comprehension."[14] More than other written works, novels can expose the inner lives of people who, to be relatable to their audience and thus make the book popular, have to reflect a type of truth or reality of the culture it inhabits. By studying novels among other literary works, historians can gain a better understanding of how people saw their world, their attitudes, beliefs, fears, etc., all of which go far into understanding their motives and actions which also turn them into historical agents.[15]

Literary representation is one the reader recognises as a reality, and its study is essential in revealing individual attitudes as well as more general background. The context informs the text, and the text, in turn, reacts to its context. The number of publications, especially from the time the publishing industry changed and became more accessible to the general public, can inform us and what was popular. Before the eighteenth century, authors would tend to please a patron, and their works would reflect a certain elite culture. When mass markets evolved for books, authors had to reflect the demands of the public. The popularity of a text, visible in the paying audience it attracted and the willingness of publishers to bet on it, highlights how its content resonated with contemporary readers.[16] As a mass media, the literary product thus carries its contemporary society's mindset. However, when the circulation of narratives was more oral-based, and when books were a luxury, such insight into the popularity and thus the relevance of a literary work in its own culture can be harder to decipher. Cultural

---

[12] Sales, *Representations of Regency England*, p. 136.
[13] Kramer, 'Literature, Criticism', pp. 127-8.
[14] Lacour, 'Concept, Reference, and History', pp. 605-7.
[15] Pasco, 'Literature as Historical Archive', p. 388.
[16] Ibid., pp. 379-80.

practices need to be put into relation with literary works to establish more precisely the impact of said literary works.

Additionally, Roger Chartier argued that the true complexity of the way in which a work is imbued with meaning "requires consideration of the close-knit relationship" between "the text itself, the object that conveys the text, and the act that grasps it."[17] Reconstructing older ways of reading goes alongside finding the meanings of a text. The history of the editions of a text can reveal much about the contemporary understanding of them. A stable text in differing printed forms can be perceived in varied ways, but changes in the text itself over different publications can incur changes in its meaning. Moreover, contrasting readings can occur, depending on the reader or the interpretative community that gives a particular meaning to the text through its specific reading practices.[18]

In Austen's novels, reading is a prominent activity, concerning sometimes what we would call private letters that are shared among the community or different kinds of books, along with different kinds of attitudes in the same group. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the portrayal of Mary, Elizabeth and Jane shows three sisters with differing attitudes towards the practice of reading, further contrasted or echoed in male characters such as Mr Bingley and Mr Bennett. In *Emma*, at diverse times, a letter is commented upon by an individual who is not its recipient. Here, the private and secret correspondence of Jane and Frank is peculiar because it is exclusively private.[19] These reactions, not readily attainable through other types of sources, can make us ask different questions or point us in new directions when engaging with real letters written in this period. Such glimpses show some ways in which a textual object could be understood and the meanings attached to it. A characterisation of the modes of reading of these communities, within their given time and place, is primordial in recovering how contemporary texts could be apprehended and understood.

In both fiction and non-fiction, the scholar needs to focus on what the text says, rather than what they think it says. Projecting one's interpretation on a written work is inherent to the act of reading, as

---

[17] R. Chartier, 'Texts, Printing, Readings', in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 154–176, p. 161.

[18] Ibid., p. 164. Reading practices can be widely different from our own. For instance, before reading became a private activity, orality and reading out loud was common and made reading a social activity.

[19] J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; Oxford, 2019) and *Emma* (1816; Oxford, 2003).

the reader creates meaning from signs in relation to their own experiences and knowledge. New Presentism's thought even asserts that all our readings of the past are essentially self-reflective readings of the present.[20] However, every text, as it is written, suggests a frozen point in time and every reader, even contemporary, encounters a text from the past. It is inescapable, or as Michael McKeon formulates it: "the present is to the past as the reader is to text."[21] As different meanings can be found, the text becomes unstable. Neither its author (be they completely autonomous, influenced by their context or controlled by their language) nor its reader, have the one and only authoritative view of a text. This plurality of meanings creates space for both the author's intention and the reader's interpretation.

Some broad methodological lines have been advanced to maintain the legitimacy of the historical interpretation of texts. To historicise a text is to gather contextual knowledge brought by its contemporary readers, to reconstruct the intentions of the writer, to place the work in the broader discourse of its period, and to pay attention to its language.[22] Reading critically is thus essential to be alert to literary conventions, tropes, genres, codes, etc., present in the historical context of the work. Particular attention should be brought to repeated elements. If the repetition occurs across several texts by different authors, the element might have a special significance, in reflecting a concern or a reality, for the contemporary audience and can be compared to other kinds of documentation to define more precisely what this signification entails.[23] Mr Knightley suggests Weymouth is an "idlest haunt" yet this watering place had a reputation of being "staid and starched" due to the recurrent presence of the royal family.[24] Contemporary readers would have deducted from that comment that Mr Knightley sometimes lets his judgement be clouded by his sentiments, whereas a reader unaware of the broader context of spas towns in Regency England would take it at face value. A text contains more than one kind of information and is embedded in more than one context: an awareness of this is necessary to test our interpretations and weed out incorrect propositions.

---

[20] A. Baynes Coiro and T. Fulton, 'Introduction: Old, New, Now', in A. Baynes Coiro and T. Fulton (eds.), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 1–20, p. 11.

[21] M. McKeon, 'Theory and Practice in Historical Method', in A. Baynes Coiro and T. Fulton (eds), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 40–64, p. 41.

[22] M. Grossman, 'Limiting History', in A. Baynes Coiro and T. Fulton (eds.), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 65–84, p. 76.

[23] Pasco, 'Literature as Historical Archive', pp. 381-5.

[24] Sales, *Representations*, p. 141.

Language, in its signifying practices and its relationship to thought, agency, and time, needs to be carefully negotiated. The function of words is not only in what they say but also in how they say it. The author's intention in writing is contained within the words employed, yet those same words are part of a language system which goes beyond the text.[25] Language is constituted of modes of discourse, like idioms or rhetoric. Since language is not independent of the world but instead constitutes it, and since it shapes our understanding of it as much as we shape it to our needs, reconstructing a historical language system can shed light on how people perceived their world. The linguistic context is not limited to the study of great literary texts or an elite (they did not invent the language they use), but any text can be included, from other areas of society.[26]

Texts can touch upon any form of history since, importantly, they are a reflection of the context in which they were produced. As such, one can study textual sources through lenses as varied as gender, emotions, politics, social history, race, disability, and so on. However, intellectual history and cultural history are those concerned with texts themselves, with literature, and with ideas as a subject. It raises the question of the criteria for historical interpretation; the satisfactory plausible evidence in historical studies is different from those in literary studies, as both disciplines ask different questions and seek different kinds of answers. The methodology of historical studies is based on empirical epistemology: "a strategic and self-conscious oscillation between particularity and generality, parts and whole, […] a process that successively adjusts the nature of each in turn by reference to the other, until a point is reached where knowledge of the object" is deemed credible, probable, and sufficient.[27] In using literary works as sources, the historian needs to go back and forth between the text itself, its context, and other sources to re-examine and reconceptualise their understanding. Knowledge, in this way, is built up upon several levels, and reductive readings (stemming from textual imperialism or contextualism for instance) can be avoided.[28] By the same token, a large sample of texts should be taken into account where possible.

---

[25] Brett, 'What is Intellectual History Now?', p. 116.
[26] Ibid., p. 121.
[27] McKeon, 'Theory and Practice', pp. 48-49.
[28] Kramer, 'Literature, Criticism', pp. 106-7.

Literary texts create a web of relationships, and intertextuality between themselves and their contexts, and are embedded in their social and cultural world.[29]

Literature thus represents a kind of reality; even if its heroes and events are imagined, actions and attitudes can be assumed to be truthful to the ordinary life of a majority of people at the time. Sometimes, they even reveal contents hidden in traditional sources, for instance, the attitudes to gender, sexuality, or emotions. Since they are romances concerned with marriage, Austen's novels are full of gender expectations and norms. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the climax rests on the elopement of Kitty and Wickham: it had to be a very profound dishonour for the novel's whole suspense (will Darcy ever want to see Lizzie again?) to depend upon it. But marriage is not the only way to access gender, Austen spends time describing modes of transport, and the access a character has to mobility is related to their gender and power.[30] Lizzie walks a lot, Emma is in command of her father's carriage, but male characters can come and go as they please without being monitored in the same way female characters are. Literature can reveal in diverse ways aspects of ordinary life not as accessible in other documents, useful in feminist or queer studies to cite but a few examples, since women's lives and marginalised communities were often side-lined in "official" documents and history as written by more privileged men.

A diversification of narratives is essential for an understanding of the past, using literary works as sources can disclose views and attitudes that can be contradictory to a more monolithic vision of their time and cultures. Literature also unveils silenced voices, like those of women and ordinary people. However, there is the risk to search for a hidden meaning without first giving proper attention to what is visible in texts. Historians thus need to be aware of critical approaches to literature, language, and culture, to be able to handle properly this source material. Interdisciplinarity, essential for such an endeavour, would call for historians experienced enough in literary studies. The analysis of history in literary works is a source of tension between the text and its historical context; since each text and author is different, using the same methodology for all cannot be sufficient.[31] Yet, as with any other historical document, a literary work still needs to be compared to other sources, to corroborate or contrast the

---

[29] Pasco, 'Literature as Historical Archive', p. 384.
[30] Sales, *Representations*, pp. 156-8.
[31] D. LaCapra, *History, Literature, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, 2013), pp. 29-30.

conclusion that can be found about the past it represents. But literature is necessary to expand the scope of history itself, or in the words of Michelle Perrot, "novels […] may be consulted as legitimate historical sources because they reveal more fully than other sources the ideals of private life that fascinated their perspicacious authors."[32] Lastly, even if a text is not and should not be considered a perfect mirror of its society, it nonetheless participates in the historical record of said society as pieces of the collective imagination enshrined in specific symbolic representations.[33]

---

[32] M. Perrot, quoted in Pasco, 'Literature as Historical Archive', pp. 381-5.

[33] S. Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French, Literature* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 7-8.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; Oxford, 2019)

_____, *Emma* (1816; Oxford, 2003)

Secondary Sources

Baynes Coiro, A., and Fulton, T., (eds.), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2012)

Brett, A., 'What is Intellectual History Now?' in D. Cannadine (ed.), *What Is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 113–131

Chartier, R., 'Texts, Printing, Readings', in L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 154–176

Gaunt, S., *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge, 1995)

Grossman, M., 'Limiting History', in Baynes Coiro, A., and Fulton, T., (eds), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 65–84

Korhonen, K. (ed.), *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate* (Leiden, 2006)

Kramer, L. S., 'Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra', in Hunt, L., (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 97–130

LaCapra, D., *History, Literature, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, 2013)

Lacour, C. B., 'Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Hegel's 'Truth in Art': Concept, Reference, and History', *ELH*, 59 (1992), 597–623

McKeon, M., 'Theory and Practice in Historical Method', in Baynes Coiro, A., and Fulton, T. H., (eds.), *Rethinking Historicism from Shakespeare to Milton* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 40–64

Nitz, J., 'History, a Literary Artifact? The Traveling Concept of Narrative in/on Historiographic Discourse', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 15 (2013), 69–85

Pasco, A. H., 'Literature as Historical Archive', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), 373–394

Sales, R., *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London, 1996)

White, H., 'Historical Discourse and Literary Writing', in Korhonen, K., (ed.), *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 25–33

The Power of Pictures: Visual Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Black Protest

KATHERINE MCGHEE

Katherine (Katie) Mcghee is a fourth-year Single Honours history student, graduating in June 2023. Katherine's particular areas of interest lie within Scottish history, and she has recently completed her dissertation on Jacobite song and enjoys studying history through the lens of the history of emotions. Upon graduating, Katherine is interested in pursuing a career in the Scottish heritage sector.[1]

Mid-twentieth century America saw a fresh wave of Black protest with Black Americans resisting the discrimination and violence they had faced for centuries. Despite various advances in racial equality at the start of the twentieth century, Black Americans were far from enjoying equal rights to their white counterparts. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s created a "master framework for protest" that would be used by movements in years to follow.[2] Visual culture was one of the most effective forms of raising awareness and galvanising the civil rights movement. Through film and television, photography and art, social rights activists were able to ensure the widespread dissemination of their messages and events as well as express the emotions of the movement. Nicholas Lampert is one of many scholars who have praised how civil rights activists were able to harness the power of visual culture.[3] The study of visual culture is a relatively new field within the wider discipline of history but can nonetheless provide insight into past events. It is a topic that has been widely debated and its intersections with cultural studies and art history have been explored in depth.[4] The controversial field of visual studies raises many questions, however, in the context of this essay, the most important question is that of the role imagery played in Black protest. It has been generally agreed by scholars such as Jenny Woodley that visual culture was a vital form of protest for Black Americans and it was transformative of political and social movements.[5] While visual culture as a whole significantly changed

---

[1] This essay was written for HI356J: Thinking History.

[2] T. V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis, 2005), p. 15.

[3] N. Lampert, *A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements* (New York, 2013), p. 11.

[4] I. Castaneda, 'Visual Culture, Art History and the Humanities', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 8 (2009), 41–55.

[5] J. Woodley, *Art for Equality The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Kentucky, 2014), pp. 98-107.

Black protest in the mid-twentieth century, some types were more impactful than others. The role of film, television, photography, and art during the middle decades of the twentieth century can all be held to different degrees of importance. To understand the influence of visual culture, these individual forms can be further explored in order to shed some light on their significance.

By the mid-twentieth century, film and television were gaining rapid popularity and the phenomenon played an important role in Black protest. It has been described as the "massest of mass media" during the civil rights movement, with broadcasts reaching all corners of America and beyond.[6] Through television, civil rights activists were able to spread their messages on a wider platform and communicate anti-racist ideologies with those who would otherwise have taken little interest. Civil rights issues were broadcast on news channels more frequently, and Black Americans made increasing appearances on television shows.[7] For white Americans with little understanding of, or familiarity with, Black people or their culture, "television brought Black people… into white people's living rooms".[8] It was a less obvious form of protest than others, but the mere act of having Black individuals in roles with this level of exposure, that were previously occupied by white people, was important in integration efforts. The television and film industry is often viewed as being ahead of its time and in the mid-twentieth century, it was making significant advancements towards racial equality. As well as providing a platform for activists, many television networks tried to eradicate stereotypical and racist images of Black people, with NBC for one introducing the policy of "integration without identification", meaning that Black people should not be cast in roles that were race-based, as well as banning racist language and stereotypes.[9] This progress on screen was important in Black protest and in countering racist ideas in America.

Although there was a certain increase in Black representation in American film and television, some have argued that it was so minor that it made little difference. Kay Mills raises questions as to whether television was a tool or a hindrance to Black protest as it was predominantly controlled by white

---

[6] A. Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana, 2012), p. 2.
[7] K. Mills, *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case that Transformed Television* (Mississippi, 2004), pp. 32-34.
[8] Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*, p. 3.
[9] Ibid., p. 19.

people. She recognises that Black faces only appeared on local channels and very rarely nationally and coverage of Black political and social movements was limited to northern channels.[10] It was a constant battle for control over broadcasts between those who were sympathetic to civil rights efforts and those who were not. Television in mid-twentieth century America probably ended up being as much of a tool against the movement as for it. Racism was still deeply rooted in Hollywood through the entire twentieth century and this was evident in the films released. There were many classic Hollywood productions which enforced racial stereotypes or neglected to cast racial minorities in roles. For example, the 1950 Warner Bros. film, *Storm Warning*, lacked any Black actors in main roles despite the film being about the Ku Klux Klan.[11] The absence of Black individuals in film and the continuation of racial stereotypes were a hindrance to Black protest in the mid-twentieth century. It prevented an increased white understanding of racial inequality in America and it influenced viewers with pro-white ideologies.

For the white individuals controlling television and film that were not racist, it was more of a case of diplomacy and of avoiding controversial political issues. To maximise their viewership, it was safer to neither promote nor condemn anti-racist movements. However, the result of this was less national coverage of the civil rights movement as well as fewer minorities featuring in broadcasts and starring in films.[12] On-screen visual culture being controlled primarily by white people limited how useful it could be for Black protest. It had the potential to be a powerful tool in spreading news of events and messages of freedom, however, it ultimately broadcasted only what the white population of America wanted to see. It made minor changes to how activists spread news of their activities, however, so as a whole, it had little impact on the success of Black mid-twentieth century protest.

One of the most influential tools in the fight for civil rights was the use of photographic images and it began to be recognised that photography could be used as propaganda. It has been argued that photography was the most important visual means of protest with Isaiah Wooden claiming that photographs were "the period's most significant aesthetic objects".[13] The advantage of photography was

---

[10] Mills, *Changing Channels,* pp. 7-11.

[11] E. C. Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (London, 2015), p. 1.

[12] Ibid., pp. 14-22.

[13] I. M. Wooden, 'Bearing Witness: Intersections of Art and Protest', *PAJ (Baltimore, Md.),* 37 (2015), 50–55, p. 52.

that it could be circulated through many different mediums such as in pamphlets and newspapers and on posters.[14] It is commonly said that "a picture is worth 1000 words", and this was no different during the civil rights movement. Many working-class Americans were not literate in the middle decades of the twentieth century so were limited in the information they could absorb from newspapers and other written sources.[15] Photographic images of Black protest could reach wider groups and were not restricted to class. The reach that photography had during the civil rights movement was unparalleled and as Leigh Raiford recognises, "photography proved a more accessible… and democratic medium than television".[16] Photographs were financially accessible for Black Americans which was important as many of those fighting for racial equality came from precarious financial backgrounds due to discrimination in the American education system and the workplace. Other forms of visual culture, on the other hand, such as television and art often came with a price.

In addition to accessibility, photography was a vital element of Black protest due to its emotive nature. A photograph captures a moment with a degree of truth, allowing those not present to experience and understand events.[17] At the time it was difficult to manipulate a photograph and in depicting the reality of violence, discrimination, or protests during the mid-twentieth century, photography became a ubiquitous form of propaganda. Images can be far more emotive than the written word and generally have had a far greater impact. Photographs put faces to the names of the civil rights movement and the victims of racial violence. One example of an occasion where a photograph was used as an emotional tool in the civil rights movement was following the murder of Emmett Till. Till was a fourteen-year-old Black boy who was brutally murdered by two white men in Mississippi in 1955.[18] His mother demanded there should be an open casket at his funeral and that photographs were to be published to show the

---

[14] Z. Trodd, 'A Negative Utopia: Protest Memory and the Spatio-Symbolism of Civil Rights Literature and Photography', *African American Review,* 42 (2008), 25–40, p. 27.

[15] 'Estimates of Illiteracy, by States: 1950', United States Census Bureau (1959), https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1959/demographics/p23-006.pdf [Accessed 06/12/22].

[16] L. Raiford, '"Come Let Us Build a New World Together": SNCC and Photography of the Civil Rights Movement', *American Quarterly*, 59 (2007), 1129–1157, p. 1131.

[17] E. Abel, 'Skin, Flesh, and the Affective Wrinkles of Civil Rights Photography', *English Language Notes*, 51 (2013), 147–172.

[18] D. A. Anderson, 'Blindness and Insight: the Civil Rights Movement in Photographs and Text', *Afterimage*, 26 (1998), 4–7, p. 4.

world what had happened to her son, demonstrating she understood the power of photographs.[19] The images of Emmett Till's body, published in magazines and newspapers, shocked many Americans into protest and as Harold K. Bush notes, it helped to "usher in a long period of national debate".[20] The publication of the photographs was a form of protest in itself from Emmett's mother, Mamie Till (1921-2003), who would later become a key leader in the civil rights movement.[21] Her grief propelled her to be at the forefront of the campaign for change in America both for African-Americans and for women. At her son's funeral, she notably declared, "darling, you have not died in vain… your life has been sacrificed for something", and by this, she meant his legacy would not be wasted but used to protest for Black rights.[22] In addition to this, images were also published of Emmett Till's mother weeping at his funeral (Image 1) which touched many, particularly mothers who could relate to Mamie Till and they became more inclined to sympathise with the movement.[23] The images represented the stand against racial violence and helped to fuel fires of protest across America through the anger, shock and sympathy they provoked.

---

[19] R. Feldstein, '"I Wanted the Whole World to See": Race, Gender and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till', in J. Meyerowitz (ed.), *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-War America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 263–303, p. 266.

[20] H. K. Bush, 'Continuing Bonds and Emmett Till's Mother', *Southern Quarterly*, 50 (2013), 9–27, p. 5.

[21] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[22] J. H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (New York, 2011), p. 67.

[23] Feldstein, '"I Wanted the Whole World to See"', pp. 273-4.

Image 1: *The Chicago Defender* article featuring images of Mamie Till grieving her son.[24]

Specific civil rights organisations such as SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordination Committee), benefitted greatly from photography and the publication of images. They understood the reach that images had for those that had not personally witnessed white violence providing evidence of discrimination.[25] Susan Bragg's work highlights the importance of photography in representing female activists in a way unseen before. Not only images of Black female activists were published but also Black female celebrities and working-class women, breaking not only racial but gender stereotypes.[26] It was important that working-class women were influenced as they made up a large percentage of Black

---

[24] Ibid., p. 274.

[25] Raiford, '"Come Let Us Build a New World Together"', p. 1135.

[26] S. Bragg, 'Race Women, Crisis Maids, and NAACP Sweethearts: Gender and the Visual Culture of the NAACP in the Early Twentieth Century', *American Studies,* 59 (2020), 77–98.

Americans and could bring a lot of support to the movement. There would have been little hope for the success of Black protest if such a large group of the Black community was neglected.

Photography also allowed activist organisations to maintain their public image at a time when things were becoming more commercially televised and ultimately less controllable.[27] In 1963, a peaceful protest in Birmingham, Alabama, led by Martin Luther King Jr.(1929-68) was met with police brutality. Alabama was one of the most racially segregated states and the purpose of the march was to promote the integration of Black Americans in society. The police reaction was violent, and protesters were attacked with pressure hoses and dogs (Image 2). These attacks from the police were captured in photographs which could be utilised to show the severity of the events. The images, which showed young African-Americans being attacked with fire hoses, were published for all to see and increased support for the movement.[28] These images were transformative and showed the emotions that could be stirred by a simple image. It helped to not only spread awareness of white violence but also to unite the civil rights movement.

Image 2: *No Man is an Island: Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham*, taken by Bob Adelman, photograph of Black protesters being attacked with water hoses.[29]

Therefore, photography in the mid-twentieth century was crucial to Black protest and an effective method of spreading awareness of white violence. For many, "seeing was believing" and

---

[27] Raiford, '"Come Let Us Build a New World Together"', p. 1132.

[28] Ibid., p. 1129.

[29] *No Man is an Island: Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham* by Bob Adelman, 1963, (High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia).

images acted as proof of how severe racial discrimination was. There are very few other forms of propaganda that can match the reality and the emotions stimulated by photographs. They influenced the emotions of those who had not witnessed racial violence first-hand. Photographic images give the viewer the power to witness events, albeit second-hand, and the same applies to modern-day historians for whom photographs are invaluable. They capture the events of the civil rights movement and give glimpses of the past that cannot be found anywhere else. Leigh Raiford identifies their importance in contemporary scholarship saying: "We are invited, demanded, expected to recount and memorialize. To remember".[30] The power of these images is timeless. They were beneficial to Black protest in the twentieth century and remain useful in modern movements such as Black Lives Matter, showing how little times have changed. [31]

Another powerful form of visual culture during the mid-twentieth century was art. After the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, Black culture was increasingly expressed through art and Black artists became widely celebrated.[32] Art was found to be an impactful form of protest, often provoking strong emotional responses. One example of art as a form of Black protest during the civil rights movement was the work of Emory Douglas (1943-), the lead artist for the Black Panther Party (BPP). His work was featured in almost every issue of the party's magazine, *The Black Panther*, in the 1960s and his images became very recognisable as a visual representation of the BPP's ideologies and messages. His work took a striking form with both simplicity and bold, bright colours and the pieces often included poignant statements of protest about police brutality or the suffering of Black communities.[33] Lampert describes Douglas's art as being "designed to rip the heart out of those oppressing the Black community", through the anger and distress presented.[34] It was effective in gaining support for the BPP and informing the public of the issues facing Black Americans. His work was very expressive of the anger felt by the BPP with one of his pieces portraying a Black woman holding three knives and wearing a badge saying, "death to the fascist pigs" (Image 3). It enforced the idea of violent Black protest and

---

[30] Raiford, '"Come Let Us Build a New World Together"', p. 1130.

[31] C. J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: a Brief History of an Idea* (New York, 2017), p. 133.

[32] N. I. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York, 2007), p. 5.

[33] Wooden, 'Bearing Witness', p. 54.

[34] Lampert, *A People's Art History of the United States,* p. 199.

also resonated with Black women as much as it did Black men.[35] His art was not limited to class or gender which allowed his work to impact a wide cross-section of Black Americans. Douglas himself confirms the importance of visual culture, declaring that "art is a powerful tool, a language that can be used to enlighten, inform and guide to action".[36] His work demonstrates that art was a form of protest in itself and his illustrations go further in condemning white violence than many other visual images. Douglas's art, as Wooden describes it, was a "call for rebellion against repressive regimes of power".[37]

Image 3: Emory Douglas's illustration in *The Black Panther*, 4 July 1970.[38]

Art during the mid-twentieth century was transformative for the civil rights movement and was often a symbol of Black protest. It had the power to encapsulate emotions and ideas while allowing room for interpretation from different groups of society.[39] Paintings by Black artists were popular during this

---

[35] Ibid., pp. 199-200.

[36] A. Gardener, *'Emory Douglas'*, Museum of Modern Art (2021). https://www.moma.org/artists/70943#fnref:1 [Accessed 06/12/22].

[37] Wooden, 'Bearing Witness', p. 53.

[38] Lampert, *A People's Art History of the United States*, p. 200.

[39] Woodley, *Art for Equality,* pp. 98-9.

time period and gave a new platform to civil rights, whether through haunting imagery or compelling storytelling. Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), was another African-American artist who produced paintings which helped to define art within Black protest. *Students and Soldiers* (Image 4) tells the story of the Little Rock Nine, a group of Black children being escorted by US soldiers to protect them from racial attacks while trying to go to a white-only school in Arkansas.[40] His work raised the profile of events like these and allowed more Americans to understand the racial segregation and violence of the South when its coverage on national news channels was limited. It is a form of protest in itself, to take an event like that and paint it so vividly and show it to the world.

Image 4: Jacob Lawrence, *Soldiers and Students*, 1962.[41]

While the more typical paintings and drawings of well-known artists during the civil rights movement such as Jacob Lawrence or Emory Douglas had a powerful effect on Black protesters, capturing events and emotions, other art forms cannot be overlooked. Sculpture may not be the first form of visual culture to come to mind when considering the civil rights movement, but its contribution was very interesting. *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (Image 5) is a sculpture by Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012), an African-American artist, which celebrates ideas of female Black beauty. The sculpture, carved out of cedar wood is inspired by Catlett's own experience as a Black, working-class woman.[42]

---

[40] Anderson, 'Blindness and Insight', p. 4.

[41] *Soldiers and Students* by Jacob Lawrence, 1962 (Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth).

[42] Wooden, 'Bearing Witness', p. 54.

Although this piece of art may not have reached the wide audiences others featured in magazines or on posters did, it draws attention to aspects of Black protest that other works neglect. It conveys not only issues of racism but also the intertwined politics of gender and class. Her work resonated with others from similar backgrounds and was of an inspiring nature.[43] While it is more subtle in its resistance, by appreciating Black culture and the roles of Black women in society, it is a stirring anti-racist protest.

Image 5: Elizabeth Catlett. *Homage to my Young Black Sisters*, 1968.[44]

In conclusion, the power of the image in the mid-twentieth century was vital to Black protest. It played an important role in spreading messages of activism and influencing Americans, resulting in an increase in support for civil rights. Film and television were increasingly large and valuable platforms for Black activists to raise awareness of their protest. Through broadcasting, civil rights activists were able to reach areas of America that they may not otherwise have been able to, and programs featuring Black people gave them a means of portraying themselves away from racial stereotypes. However, there were drawbacks to on-screen activism as televised media was largely controlled by white men in the

---

[43] A. Bateman, 'Narrative and Seriality in Elizabeth Catlett's Prints', *Journal of Black Studies*, 47 (2016), 258–272, p. 259.
[44] *Homage to my Young Black Sisters* by Elizabeth Catlett, 1968 (private collection).

1950s and 60s. This meant that appearances from racial minorities were limited and news of civil rights activities were usually only broadcasted locally in an attempt to avoid controversial, political issues. Furthermore, filmography had the potential to change the political stances surrounding racism in America, but Hollywood neglected to feature Black individuals in major roles in films which hindered Black protest. Another form of visual culture during this period was photography which was perhaps the most influential method of Black protest. Photographic images were published in magazines and on pamphlets across the country which raised awareness of the violence and discrimination Black Americans were facing. It showed the truth of the civil rights movement and images of white violence were shared in order to provoke emotional responses from both Black and white Americans. For those that could not personally witness Black protest, it was captured in photographs, allowing them to understand what was happening. Emotional responses to photographs such as those of Emmet and Mamie Till also increased support for anti-racist protests due to the shock and anger they triggered. Finally, art was another stirring form of visual culture and the creation of art by Black artists was a form of protest against the discrimination they faced. The works of Emory Douglas are an example of how political images had the power to spread messages of activism and were deeply influential. Some artworks recorded the events of the civil rights movement while others celebrated Black culture. All of these were forms of Black protest and gave anti-racist activism another platform. The power of imagery was unmatched in its reach and influence during the middle of the twentieth century and was an undeniably important tool in the success of Black protest.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Adelman, B., *No Man is an Island: Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham*, photograph, 1963 (High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia)

Catlett, E., *Homage to my Young Black Sisters*, sculpture, 1968 (private collection)

Lawrence, J., *Soldiers and Students*, painting, 1962 (Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth)

'Estimates of Illiteracy, by States: 1950', United States Census Bureau (1959), <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1959/demographics/p23-006.pdf> [Accessed 04/12/22]

Secondary Sources

Abel, E., 'Skin, Flesh, and the Affective Wrinkles of Civil Rights Photography', *English Language Notes*, 51 (2013), 147–172

Anderson, D. A., 'Blindness and Insight: the Civil Rights Movement in Photographs and Text', *Afterimage*, 26 (1998), 4–7

Bateman, A., 'Narrative and Seriality in Elizabeth Catlett's Prints', *Journal of Black Studies*, 47 (2016), 258–272

Bodroghkozy, A., *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana, 2012)

Bragg, S., 'Race Women, Crisis Maids, and NAACP Sweethearts: Gender and the Visual Culture of the NAACP in the Early Twentieth Century', *American Studies*, 59 (2020), 77–98

Bush, H. K., 'Continuing Bonds and Emmett Till's Mother', *Southern Quarterly*, 50 (2013), 9–27

Castaneda, I., 'Visual Culture, Art History and the Humanities', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 8 (2009), 41–55

Cone, J. H., The Cross and the Lynching Tree (New York, 2011)

Feldstein, R., '"I Wanted the Whole World to See": Race, Gender and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till', in J. Meyerowitz (ed.), *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-War America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 263–303

Gardener, A., 'Emory Douglas', Museum of Modern Art (2021), <https://www.moma.org/artists/70943#fnref:1> [Accessed 06/12/22]

Huggins, N. I., Harlem Renaissance (New York, 2007)

Lampert, N., *A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements* (New York, 2013)

Lebron, C. J., *The Making of Black Lives Matter: a Brief History of an Idea* (New York, 2017)

Mills, K., *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case that Transformed Television* (Mississippi, 2004)

Raiford, L., '"Come Let Us Build a New World Together": SNCC and Photography of the Civil Rights Movement', *American Quarterly*, 59 (2007), 1129–1157

Reed, T. V., *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis, 2005)

Scott, E. C., *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (London, 2015)

Trodd, Z., 'A Negative Utopia: Protest Memory and the Spatio-Symbolism of Civil Rights Literature and Photography', *African American Review,* 42 (2008), 25–40

Wooden, I. M., 'Bearing Witness: Intersections of Art and Protest', *PAJ (Baltimore, Md.),* 37 (2015), 50–55

Woodley, J., *Art for Equality The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Kentucky, 2014)

The Emotional Power of Photography: *The Body of Emmett Till*

HANNAH LEWIS

Hannah Lewis is a fourth-year Single Honours History student. She enjoys studying 20th century American history, this essay served as the inspiration for her dissertation on photography within the civil rights movement and public memory. Upon graduation she plans to study MSc in Contemporary History at the University of Edinburgh and pursue a career as a documentary researcher.[1]

The art of photography offers unique points of study and analysis to a historian. Through studying photographic images the historian can humanise and give dignity to individuals and events of the past. Photography as an art had been on a journey in the early twentieth century as its aesthetic appreciation was growing among artists who were discontented with the limitations of painting. As well as aesthetic uses in art, photography in the twentieth century became a useful source for journalists as a way to illustrate their reports.[2] Literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, can be considered one of the most influential works on the visual experience of photography.[3] Here, Barthes details that photography captures the presence of something that really exists or what has existed in the past, this gives it an advantage in documenting things that can be taken away in time. This concept was of interest to him as he studied how photography can spread messages and represent human suffering, it details that photography cannot hide death and decay and that it can capture what is already dead to bring it back to life.[4] Photography also has the power to access emotions and move people due to its realism and sense of authenticity. This is exceptionally clear in the photograph, *The Body of Emmet Till*, which depicts the body of the lynched schoolboy at the funeral home with his mother standing over his body. This photograph was captured by David Jackson for *Jet* magazine and was to become a defining image of the American Civil Rights Movement.[5]

---

[1] This essay was written for HI356J: Thinking History.

[2] P. Taminiaux, *The Paradox of Photography*, (Amsterdam, 2009), p. 6.

[3] G. Batchen, 'Palinode: An Introduction To Photography Degree Zero', in G. Batchen (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida*, (Massachusetts, 2009), p. 1.

[4] P. Lombardo, *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes*, (Athens, 1990), pp. 50-60.

[5] Time Photo, 'When One Mother Defied America: The Photo That Changed the Civil Rights Movement', (10 July 2016), <https://time.com/4399793/emmett-till-civil-rights-photography/> [Accessed 11/03/22].

The shocking and graphic photograph of the murdered fourteen-year-old, Emmett Till demonstrates the ways that photographic images hold social and political power. As a confident young man from Chicago, his mother was concerned about how he would be met in the Jim Crow South. Till was travelling to Mississippi to spend time with family, particularly his cousins who were of similar age. Before embarking on his journey to the South, Mamie Mobley warned her son of the expectations and codes of behaviour for Black boys. Till had previously been unaware of the extent of these rules within the racial hierarchy of the region. Once arriving and settling into his time in Mississippi, Till took on the same chores as his cousins and after a day of working in the fields, they went to the local, white-owned grocery store for sweets. While he was in the store an incident occurred when Carolyn Bryant, a white woman whose husband owned the store, claimed Till had whistled at her. After leaving the store Till swore his cousins to secrecy of the event and to not tell their Uncle Mose what happened. Days later Till was abducted and murdered, his mutilated body was found three days later in the Tallahatchie River.[6] Bryant's husband along with his half-brother had brutally tortured and murdered the young boy and when he was found, Till could only be identified by the ring that he wore. Mamie Mobley insisted that her son have an open casket funeral in Chicago and permitted *Jet* magazine to publish the infamous photograph of her son's corpse. Later editions published a picture of Mose White, Till's Uncle identifying the murderers in what was a farce of a trial. The evidence to convict the criminals was overwhelming but an all-white jury deliberated for only sixty-seven minutes to reach a not guilty verdict. A short while after the trial, the murderers confessed to their crime in *Look* magazine for $4,000, however, they were protected by double jeopardy within the Fifth Amendment and thus could not be tried for the same crime twice.[7] This case evidences the emotive power that the photograph of Till in his open casket would have on the Civil Rights Movement and within American society for decades to come.

In regards to the case of Emmett Till photography plays a significant role in this place in history. Upon arrival at the mortuary to see her son's battered body for the first time, Till's mother and family

---

[6] D. M. Singleton, 'Emmet Louis Till Young, Innocent, and Vulnerable', in D.M Singleton (ed.), *Unsung Heroes of the Civil Rights Movement: Profiles of Lessons Learned* (Lanham, 2014), pp.18-23.

[7] S. Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought To Be: The Black Freedom Struggle From Emancipation To Obama*, (Massachusetts, 2010), pp. 262-3.

were accompanied by a journalist and photographer, David Jackson. In witnessing the unimaginable damage to her child's body Mobley insisted that Jackson take photographs of her son's corpse as she believed that the horror inflicted upon him was too unimaginable to describe, she also persisted that he have an open casket funeral as well as Jackson's photographs published in *Jet* magazine to "let the people see what they did to my boy".[8] Mobley's courage to publish the photographs of her son's body had a profound effect on American society and awakened both Black and white viewers across the nation, and the world, to the atrocities of the South. The emotive photograph of Mobley solemnly gazing down at her son's battered body enlightened a consciousness among young liberal activists, particularly in the North who had been somewhat sheltered from the atrocities of the South, upon viewing the photograph these activists had found the spark to what would become the Civil Rights Movement. The publication of the photograph made young Black people across the nation question the American values of justice and liberty for all and how they evidently had not been applied to Till and was the graphic wake-up call for their white allies.[9] The power of the photograph in sparking a national movement can be argued to be a result of its style of "near documentary" photography. The term was coined by art historian Michael Fried, who details that this refers to photographs that are not theatrical but the subjects are aware they are being photographed, they are not making a spectacle of the event only giving quiet and genuine recognition to what is happening. Near documentary photography aims to emphasise everyday events, such as a funeral, in a way that is directed, yet remains authentic.[10] Therefore, it is evident that there is significance in this style of near documentary photography as its authenticity opened the minds of America to discussion and national protest over the conditions of race relations not only in the South but the whole country.

The power of Jackson's image of Till is seen in his artistic choices regarding his photograph. Jackson's famous image of Till can be compared to Mantegna's 1480 painting *The Lamentation of Christ*. The painting uses unusual mathematical angles that result in Christ's limbs and head appearing

---

[8] M. Mobley quoted in D. S. Anderson, *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement*, (Jackson, 2015), pp. 55-6.

[9] C. Hudson-Weems, 'Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement', *Journal of Black Studies*, 29 (1998), 179–188.

[10] M. S. Roth, 'Why Photography Matters to the Theory of History', review of G. Didi-Huberman and S. B. Lillis, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (2008*)* and review of M. Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008), *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 90–103.

significantly larger than reality would perceive. It also depicts a weeping Mary standing beside her son's executed corpse as John comforts her. According to art historian Hubert Schrade, the painting is also significant as "None of the mourners dare touch the corpse, He is untouchable."[11] From this, it is evident that Jackson took inspiration from Mantegna's painting for his image of Till. It carries many similarities of a dead son, an abused body with unnatural proportions and grief-stricken, yet dignified mourners. Here Jackson has centred Till as a Christlike figure which then evokes associations of purity, youth, injustice and oppression. In making comparisons between a painting from the 1480s and a photograph from 1955 it is clear that there is a relevancy to visual histories from centuries past that continues to live on today, creating the opportunity for discussion of how art can impact emotional responses that result in real-world action.

The response to this picture is what made it an infamous and defining image of the Civil Rights Movement particularly among existing African American activists. In the decade before the Till murder activists in Montgomery, Alabama tirelessly campaigned against a criminal justice system that disproportionately attacked African Americans in aggressive policing and sexual violence. For activist Rosa Parks her fury was ignited upon seeing Jackson's image of Till, his mother's bravery to publicise his funeral and the injustice given in court. This led her to take a stance of her own by refusing to move from her bus seat for a white man and remained sitting until she was arrested with the image of Till in her mind. Her refusal to move and be arrested sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott and with Till's murder being a catalyst for Parks' determination not to leave her seat, her own protest highlighted injustice in the system of law and thus gave further publicity to the abhorrence of the Till case. [12] From this it is evident that Jackson's photograph of Till had profound impacts on the early Civil Rights Movement, as Raiford argues that photography alone is not responsible for community action and raising awareness but it can strongly encourage these processes, stating that the Till photograph was a "galvanizing potential of visual technology for black political communities".[13] Therefore, demonstrating that African American viewers recognised both the atrocities of white terror and the influence that

---

[11] H. Schrade quoted in C. Eisler, 'Mantegna's Meditation on the Sacrifice of Christ: His Synoptic Savior', *Artibus et Historiae*, 27 (2006), 9–22.

[12] J. Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*, (Boston, 2018), pp. 148-150.

[13] L. Raiford quoted in S. M. Smith, 'The Afterimages of Emmett Till', *American Art*, 29 (2015), 22–27.

photography can have in spreading their activism to the mass media and political campaigns. From this, it can be seen how the Till photograph became an icon of the Civil Rights Movement and reveals the opportunity that photography brings in sparking passionate nationwide activism that alters federal policy and thus, changes the course of a nation's history.

Jackson's photograph of Till also demonstrates how photography can capture the mood of a particular period in time, especially emotive images as they can represent the feelings of a particular community in that space of time. When the photograph of Till was taken there was no way of knowing the national impact it would have, as supported by Geimer who argues that a single photograph cannot construct future events and that the emotions an image evokes can only be known at a later time.[14] In this case, the response was known very soon after. The reaction to the photograph revealed the mood of the time, particularly that of African Americans, to be of anguish and exasperation towards generations of oppression that were to be made known in protests for the remainder of the decade. Therefore demonstrating that photography offers the opportunity to centre a specific image around a social movement.

Although photography can offer many opportunities of study to a historian it can be argued that it also has some pitfalls as a historical source as demonstrated by Barthes, Harris, Lanzmann and Wajcman. One of the pitfalls of photography can be that of the line between authenticity and artistry. To illustrate this issue Barthes argues that in capturing a photograph there is the immediate acceptance that the image is natural and thus the scene is really there, captured by a machine away from human error. However, he goes on to then detail that the photographer has the ability to manipulate the scene in its framing, distance, lighting, focus and speed. Thus allowing the photographer's own artistry to dictate the given image.[15] *The Body of Emmett Till*, is a photograph that is accurate to the lived experience witnessed by his family when viewing his body. His own mother refused the funeral director to cover the violent injuries inflicted upon her son as she maintained that the condition of his body would not be believed through words alone, the tortured body of her son had to be accompanied by

---

[14] P. Geimer, 'Photography as a "Space of Experience": On the Retrospective Legibility of Historic Photographs', *Getty Research Journal*, 7 (2015), 97–108.

[15] J. Emerling, *Photography: History and Theory* (London, 2021), p. 76.

photographic visual evidence.[16] Barthes has presented a compelling argument towards a disadvantage of photography as a historical source, however, in this case, Jackson had captured the authentic image of Till in his coffin. The image is taken from a downward angle but it is not melodramatic or distasteful it does capture the true suffering inflicted upon Till, it has not been distorted or exaggerated. It has been taken in Fried's style of near documentary. Therefore, although the personal artistry of a photographer can lead to pitfalls in photography as a historical source, this is not the case for this image as its accuracy and authenticity create an emotive reaction to reveal the horrors of white terror without additional artistic liberties being taken.

As well as artistic choices, issues surrounding ethics can also be argued to be a pitfall of photography as a historical source. Throughout the history of the Jim Crow South memorabilia taken from lynchings was a popular memento of the event, particularly lynching postcards. Here, the images were spread in the form of postcards and served as a reminder to the African American community that this crime could be committed against them without any interference from the law.[17] Harris argues that this then demonstrates the ethical concerns surrounding this type of photography as an individual's death has been photographed without their consent and then commodified to be sold among supporters of Jim Crow laws. Thus revealing, that families of lynching victims had no agency in blocking the images being shared and demonstrates that the white supremacists had a sense of ownership of the victims even after their deaths by selling and commodifying the events leading up to their final moments.[18] Although this argument presents valid ethical concerns, in the case of the Till photograph his mother fought for the images of her tortured son to be published for the purpose of alerting the country to the realities of the brutality of white supremacy. Therefore, in this instance, the photograph of Till had been taken with the consent of his family and so in evaluating it as a historical source, the issue of unethical exploitation should not be a concern as clear consent to distribute the image was granted.

---

[16] D. W., Houck, 'Killing Emmett', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 8 (2005), p. 236.

[17] S. Alexandre, *The Properties of Violence: Claims to Ownership in Representations of Lynching* (Jackson, 2012), p. 36

[18] R. Harris, 'Violence: The Lynching Photograph', in R. Penfold-Mounce (ed.) *Photography and Death: Framing Death Throughout History* (Bingley, 2020), pp. 109-128.

Another pitfall of photography is that it can give the viewer a false sense of knowing exactly what happened. In recent years the academic field of trauma studies has grown and as such, there is an appetite for academic analysis of extreme human suffering. Didi-Huberman argues that images should be used to aid in illustrating a horrific event being remembered, but cautions that no matter how much studying is done the individual will never know the full scale of the trauma inflicted as they were never there. This view came under opposition from Lanzmann and Wajcman, Lanzmann counter-argues that some images are so atrocious that they should never be taken in the first place as they are unrepresentable and hold the risk of being fixated upon, instead, the word of survivors of the trauma should be held in the highest regard. This view is supported by Wajcman who opposes Didi-Huberman believing that images do not help in the remembering of an event and that instead the image itself can be remembered more than the atrocities it captures.[19] From this it is evident that the use of historical images is a contentious and lively debate. However, in the case of Emmett Till, the image captured by Jackson ignited long-standing feelings of racial injustice and state-sanctioned abuse with this case being the spark that would lead to historic protest. The image itself did not overshow the purposes of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, photography brought those feelings to attention amounting in organised and structured protests.

In conclusion, photography is a powerful visual tool as a historical source as it allows many opportunities for a historian to investigate the emotional reaction to an image that can significantly impact a nation's history. In the case of the photograph of *The Body of Emmett Till* by David Jackson, it reveals how authentic photography has the power to stir people's emotions to open discussion of challenging national issues, it also demonstrates how works of art can be compared to one another which then adds to the existing emotional impact of the photograph. The photograph reveals the ways in which a single image can become an icon of a movement that brings about lasting policy change and finally, it demonstrates how an image can capture the mood of a particular era which in turn, sparks national protest and the demand for equal rights. However, although photography can offer a historian valuable opportunities of study it can have some pitfalls as a historical source. The photographer, as argued by Barthes, can manipulate the image in line with their own artistry and so it must be noted that images

---

[19] M. S. Roth, 'Why Photography Matters', pp. 93-5.

should be studied with a critical eye when assessing their authenticity. The ethics of photography, particularly photographs that depict immense human suffering must be considered as Harris details that this can continue in the commodification of an individual's misery. Finally, it can be argued, as demonstrated by Lanzmann and Wajcman, that photography presents a false sense of understanding a traumatic event despite the viewer having no personal connection to it which then results in the image, rather than the event itself, being memorialised. Although these concerns are valid and should be considered by a historian when selecting photography as a historical source, the opportunities that photography brings, particularly in the case of the image of Emmett Till, can reveal the emotional impacts of a photograph that resulted in real-world action that brought about lasting socio-political change that was to alter the course of a nation's history for the benefit of all citizens.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Jackson, D., *The Body of Emmet Till*, Photography, 1955 (Library of Congress, Washington D.C)

Mantegna, A., *The Lamentation of Christ*, Painting, c. 1480 (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)

Secondary Sources

Alexandre, S., *The Properties of Violence: Claims to Ownership in Representations of Lynching* (Jackson, 2012)

Anderson, D. S., *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson, 2015)

Batchen, G., 'Palinode: An Introduction To Photography Degree Zero', in Batchen, G., (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (Massachusetts, 2009), pp.1–30

Eisler, C., 'Mantegna's Meditation on the Sacrifice of Christ: His Synoptic Savior', *Artibus et Historiae*, 27 (2006), 9–22

Emerling, J., *Photography: History and Theory* (London, 2021)

Geimer, P., 'Photography as a "Space of Experience": On the Retrospective Legibility of Historic Photographs', *Getty Research Journal*, 7 (2015), 97–108

Harris, R., 'Violence: The Lynching Photograph', in Penfold-Mounce, R. (ed.) *Photography and Death: Framing Death Throughout History*, (Bingley, 2020), pp. 109–128

Houck, D. W., 'Killing Emmett', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 8 (2005), 225–262

Hudson-Weems, C., 'Resurrecting Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement', *Journal of Black Studies*, 29 (1998), 179–188

Lombardo, P., *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes*, (Athens, 1990)

Roth, M. S., 'Why Photography Matters to the Theory of History', review of Didi-Huberman, G. and Lillis, S. B., *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (2008) and review of Fried, M., *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008), *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 90–103

Singleton, D. M., 'Emmet Louis Till Young, Innocent, and Vulnerable', in Singleton D. M (ed.) *Unsung Heroes of the Civil Rights Movement: Profiles of Lessons Learned* (Lanham, 2014), pp. 13–26

Smith, S. M., 'The Afterimages of Emmett Till', *American Art*, 29 (2015), 22–27

Taminiaux, P., *The Paradox of Photography*, Faux Titre Series (Amsterdam, 2009)

Theoharis, J., *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston, 2018)

Time Photo, 'When One Mother Defied America: The Photo That Changed the Civil Rights Movement', (10 July 2016) <https://time.com/4399793/emmett-till-civil-rights-photography/> [Accessed 11/03/22]

Tuck, S., *We Ain't What We Ought To Be: The Black Freedom Struggle From Emancipation To Obama*, (Massachusetts, 2010)

The Performance of Emotion in Kirk Discipline in Early Modern Scotland

EILIDH SHRIMPTON

Eilidh Shrimpton is a fourth-year Single Honours History student. Her primary academic interest is in the practice and culture of the Scottish churches from the 16th to 19th centuries. Upon graduation, she intends to work in Aberdeen.[1]

The Reformed Kirk of the Early Modern era, from its inception, sought to correct the morals as well as the theology of the Scottish people. Indeed, discipline was one of the three marks of the true Kirk, alongside the faithful preaching of Scripture, and the right administration of the sacraments.[2] Discipline was carried out primarily by the Kirk session, a body comprised of lay elders, elected by the congregation, along with the minister.[3] The session kept records of their business, admittedly with varying degrees of consistency. These offer a glimpse of the ordinary lives, concerns, and feelings of people who might otherwise be unknown to the historian. The performance of emotions may be observed in Kirk discipline primarily in the intentional dramatic performance of the act of repentance. This included the deliberate invocation of feelings associated with shame, humiliation, sorrow, and isolation. As will be demonstrated, an individual's performance of emotions could influence the severity of discipline enacted. Responses to discipline will also be considered, notably the inappropriate response of anger. Finally, consideration will be given to the emotional significance of the physical stool of repentance. This will be achieved by applying the framework of the history of emotions (especially William Reddy's emotional regimes) to the works of Margo Todd and Alec Ryrie on Kirk discipline.

The emotions of those summoned before the session are rarely recorded unless their expression was unusually disruptive. Nonetheless, Kirk records, like any institutional records, can be used to understand the emotional culture and norms of the institution.[4] Kirk session records are remarkably

---

[1] This essay was written for HI355P: The History of Emotions.

[2] G. D. Henderson (ed.), *The Scots Confession 1560*, (Edinburgh, 1960) p. 44.

[3] C. R. Langley, '"In the Execution of His Office": Lay Officials and the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Discipline in Scotland, c. 1600-1660', *The Seventeenth Century*, 33 (2018), 497–512, p. 498; see also J. K. Cameron (ed.), *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1972), p. 177.

[4] C. Coleborne and P. N. Stearns, 'Institutional Records: A Comment', in K. Barclay et al. (eds), *Sources for the History of Emotions* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 92–98, pp. 92-3.

unemotive, especially when one considers the emotional nature of much of the session's business: marriage, adultery, questions of paternity, feuds between neighbours, and accusations of slander. This appears to be because emotion was subordinate to the need for impartiality as the Kirk arbitrated between parishioners. David Fleming, in his work on the St Andrews's Kirk register, identifies in the attitudes of elders genuine "sincerity", which combined "a spirit of strict impartiality" with "tenderness" towards the offender. The emotional culture of the institution, then, is one of suppression of emotion on the part of the officials, although tempered with empathy.[5]

The session disciplined immoral behaviour because it was an offence against God, but God forgives those who repent of their sin. Therefore, bringing an offender, through repentance, back to fellowship with God and the Christian community was considered an act of love. The primary goal of discipline was to bring the sinner to repentance, not to punish him.[6] In other words, discipline sought to create in the offender certain emotions, such as sorrow, or even grief. Indeed, in this era, the word "mourning" was associated more with responding to sin than with responding to death.[7] Trying to maintain a positive relationship between the community and God, the Kirk created what William Reddy would term a loose emotional regime: people were free to emote as they pleased, except during the process of discipline, when certain emotions were prescribed.[8]

The creation of a genuine emotional response was important: the *First Book of Discipline* specifies that elders should look for "signes of unfaigned repentance".[9] However, the very warning against feigned repentance suggests that some of the laity felt that going through the motions of repentance was enough.[10] Public repentance was only required for public sins, although secret offences might be made public if the offender was uncooperative with the session's attempts to make them aware of their sin.[11] Before discussing the emotional impact of the rite, it will be helpful to summarise the format of repentance: the penitents would stand outside the door of the Kirk as the congregation arrived.

---

[5] D. H. Fleming (ed.), *Register of the Congregation of St Andrews*, vol I (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 388.
[6] Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline*, pp. 167-70.
[7] A. Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013), p. 50.
[8] W. M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 124-26.
[9] Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline*, p. 168.
[10] See also M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (London, 2002), p. 170.
[11] Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline,* pp. 168-72.

They would then process to the stool of repentance, where they would sit (or stand) in full view of the congregation. The stool was generally in front of the pulpit (the central focus of the Reformed Kirk), and often varying heights were used depending on the severity of the sin. Towards the end of the service the minister would ask whether they repented of their sins and the penitents would reply in the affirmative. The penitents would confess their sins, promise to not re-offend, and ask for forgiveness from God and the congregation. They would then be received back into the congregation, walking from the penitent's stool into the congregation, perhaps accompanied by two of the elders.[12]

The formal performance of repentance in the Kirk served three purposes. Firstly, in its ideal form as described in the *First Book of Discipline*, it was an expression of the emotions and the repentance of the offender. Secondly, it was a lesson to the penitent as it sought to create the emotions depicted in the rite: sorrow, grief, and isolation. Thirdly, it was a lesson to the congregation, who also had a part to play, and a prescribed emotional response, which will be discussed later.[13] As it is usually impossible to tell, at this distance, which penitents performed their role in response to genuine emotion, and which out of mere conformity, the first two will be considered together.

Repentance was a costumed performance; serious offenders wore gowns made of sackcloth, which was closely associated in the Old Testament (the basis of much of the Reformers' approach to discipline) with mourning for the dead.[14] Sackcloth also took from the Old Testament its association with mourning for sin and humbling oneself before God to beg for His mercy.[15] Linen served a similar purpose for lesser sins, as did undress: penitents were sometimes commanded to appear "beirfutted, baer haed, and face uncovered". This last point ensured that the person was recognisable, and so confronted their own shame, but the bare head lowered their status to that of a child.[16]

While the sackcloth symbolised the penitent's sorrow for sin, the confession explicitly stated the reason for the rite. Unfortunately, this was not wholly successful, and some sessions found that misbehaviour during repentance made it necessary to rehearse the performance on a Saturday evening.

---

[12] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 127-56.

[13] Ibid., pp. 128-29.

[14] Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline,* pp. 155-56 ; see also *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, New King James Version* (Nashville, 1982), Jeremiah 6:26, Genesis 37:33-4.

[15] *The Bible*, 1 Kings 21:25-29, Nehemiah 9:1-2, Jonah 3:5-10.

[16] Fleming, *Register*, I, p. 441; see also Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 147-9.

Although in some cases the session may have been correct in blaming inappropriate behaviour on ignorance and inexperience, in others it is clear that the individual was simply impenitent.[17] Ideally, however, through costuming, words, and physical posture, the penitent was to perform the emotion of sorrow. The confession was often made on one's knees, including for offences not serious enough to require an appearance on the stool. Kneeling was a "universally accepted symbol of submission and humility".[18] In repentance, as in prayer, it was intended not merely to portray these attitudes, but to help create them. The rite of repentance was not designed primarily to embarrass the penitent in front of their neighbours but to humble them before God.[19] Nonetheless, embarrassment did have a function in the control of behaviour. British advice of the time argues that sin loves concealment, and accordingly, Richard Baxter suggests that if one struggles with a besetting sin, one should confess to another person and "let the love of reputation help to subdue the love of lust".[20] That embarrassment was generally felt is evidenced by the frequency with which penitents tried to hide their faces when on the stool, often with a plaid, and the repeated orders that plaids should not be worn during repentance.[21]

Further, the penitential rite was designed to invoke feelings of isolation, perhaps loneliness. The penitent began the rite symbolically outside the Kirk, watching as the faithful entered. They then processed to an isolated place in the Kirk, accompanied only by their guards. (And of course, the other penitents, as there could be twenty or more at a given service in an urban parish. However, these do not seem to have created an additional emotional community within that of the parish, from which they were being isolated.) At the end of the service, if this was not the last Sunday assigned, the penitent would process to the door of the Kirk and once again stand outside. All of this stressed the isolation caused by sin, which separated the sinner from fellowship with the godly and increased the feeling of loneliness. This ritual isolation served one purpose: to facilitate the joyful receiving of the repentant sinner back into the congregation, forgiven by both God and man. At this stage, the penitent descended from the

---

[17] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 127-8.

[18] Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, p. 173.

[19] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, p. 171.

[20] Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, p. 173; see also R. Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter: With a Life of the Author and a Critical Examination of His Writings vol. XII*, ed. William Orme (London, 1830), p. 409.

[21] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, p. 127, pp. 148-9; Margo Todd (ed), *The Perth Kirk Session Books 1577-1590*, (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 174, p. 244.

stool and returned to the congregation, hopefully, a wiser and humbler person. If the offence was against a specific person, then the penitent would ask that person's forgiveness, and the offended party would forgive them and lead them back to their place in the congregation. If the offence was against the community as a whole, or God alone, then the responsibility of leading the penitent to the congregation belonged to the elders. The offended party did not always graciously perform the role of the forgiving neighbour: one woman was sent to the stool for venting her anger against the man who had slandered her, instead of at least making a pretence of forgiving him.[22] Such incidents demonstrate that the penitential rite was not always sufficient to alleviate personal resentment, nor was the Kirk always successful in imposing its emotional regime over the instinctive emotions of the parishioners.

Emoting appropriately could be beneficial to the penitent. An appropriate show of sorrow could lead to a reduced penance since the goal of "unfaigned repentance" had apparently been reached, especially if tears were forthcoming. Promising amendment was also helpful, as it suggested that the repentance was genuine and not merely a display of false emotion put on for the benefit of the elders. One Falkirk couple is recorded as confessing fornication "in all humility', the performance of which, with the promise of marriage, moved the session to reduce their sentence by five appearances on the stool.[23] Similarly, performing the wrong emotions could lead to an increased sentence. One adulterous couple asked the Perth session for a reduction in their sentence of six months. This was taken as a sign of arrogance and pride, and a complete failure to understand their need for humility and sorrow, and accordingly, their sentence was increased to nine months. Another sinner was made to repeat his repentance on account of his "careless and jocund form of confession".[24] These examples show that those who did not feel as they ought to would be wise to conceal the fact. Some offenders were open in their contempt of the Kirk's discipline. These took the platform offered to them in their confession to, as Todd explains, "rail against" their minister and their neighbours. Some of them even laughed on the stool, suggesting that they did not feel shame or embarrassment despite public censure.[25] Even supposing

---

[22] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, p. 167.
[23] Ibid., p. 139.
[24] Ibid., p. 139, pp. 160-2.
[25] Ibid., p. 127.

that laughter was occasionally a mask for more serious emotions, the mockery of the rite demonstrates a lack of respect for it and a lack of humility and genuine repentance.

The congregation, observing the performance of repentance, were to take warning against sinful behaviour and its consequences. They should also grieve the sin that corrupted their community, and indeed their own hearts.[26] Further, it was the whole Kirk who decided when to receive a penitent back into the congregation. In practice, they were usually represented by the elders, who assigned standardised sentences (in Perth, three Sundays for fornication).[27] However, on occasion the congregation could intervene and, feeling anger or compassion towards the offender, demand an increase or decrease in their sentence. In one instance an adulterer confessed so well that the congregation received him back into the congregation immediately.[28]

Shame was utilised in both civil and religious punishments. In contrast to the simply punitive nature of civil discipline, Early Modern theologians considered shame to be a "spiritually constructive experience".[29] Thomas Scheff says that guilt "is about what one did, shame is about the self, what one is."[30] However, this is difficult to separate in a religious context as the self is seen to control one's actions, and so what one did is the outworking of what one is. In a civil context, post-mortem shaming of hanged criminals was usually reserved for particularly violent criminals, such as murderers, robbers, and infanticidal mothers. The inclusion of mothers in a normally exclusively male punishment may have been intended to discourage child murder by making the shame of the punishment greater than the shame of having an illegitimate child. Whether or not this was enough is unknown, as the record shows only infants born and infants killed, not mothers who considered, but decided against, murdering their child.[31] Clearly, the punitive and preventative aspects of shaming rituals were comparable in religious and civil contexts, although the latter lacked the full spiritual and emotional context of the former. That shaming rituals worked in a similar manner in civil and religious contexts is further evidenced by the command

---

[26] Ibid., pp. 133-4.

[27] Todd, *The Perth Kirk Session Books*, pp. 173-81.

[28] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, p. 165, p. 158.

[29] H. Zhao, '"Holy Shame Shall Warm My Heart": Shame and Protestant Emotions in Early Modern Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 18 (2021), 1–21.

[30] Thomas Scheff quoted in D. Nash and A.-M. Kilday, *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain 1600-1900* (London, 2010), p. 6.

[31] Nash and Kilday, *Cultures of Shame*, pp. 50-68.

in English pillory punishments that criminals must not wear a hat, and the use of papers on their head stating the nature of their crimes, just as in the Scottish Kirk.[32]

Another emotion performed in the context of Kirk discipline was anger. This was an "incorrect" response to discipline. The primary instance in which anger was displayed was in response to the private admonition which was the first step in disciplinary procedures.[33] Such rejection of an elder's intervention, such disrespect of his authority, usually led to more serious proceedings, but a brief note is all that is recorded in the session minutes. It is worth noting, however, that these reactions related to the individual circumstances, or perhaps the individual elder involved, and were not an objection to the Kirk session's authority, or emotional regime, in principle.[34] Anger was also displayed where there was a perceived injustice.[35] A dramatic case study here is that of Jean Thornton, the wife of an elder. Initially hesitant about approaching the awkward situation, the session eventually required Thornton to compare, and she confessed to adultery with a former elder, Henry Adamson, claiming that he had pursued her for nine years and she had finally given in. She was instructed to make her repentance, which might have ended the matter had it not been for Adamson. He was unwilling to undergo the public humiliation of repentance and, denying all wrongdoing, persuaded the session to send his case to presbytery. He was eventually released with little more than a warning to be more circumspect in his behaviour in the future.[36] Thornton was evidently furious, because the record for 19 January 1583 indicates that in addition to absenting herself from the stool without permission, she was accused of "sclandering of honest men and women in this town alledging them mair gilty of adultery nor sche was". She was also accused of "evil speaking on the stull of repentance" on one appearance, suggesting that although physically going through the motions of repentance she was not attempting to perform the appropriate emotions.[37] Thornton's behaviour resulted in her ex-communication, though she appears to have continued living in Perth. Evidently, the elders disapproved since they disciplined one man for hosting

---

[32] Nash and Kilday, *Cultures of Shame*, pp. 68-73; Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, p. 147.
[33] Langley, 'In the Execution of His Office', p. 502.
[34] Ibid., pp. 499-502.
[35] Ibid., pp. 502-3.
[36] Todd, *The Perth Kirk Session Books*, pp. 48-52.
[37] Ibid., p. 250.

her in his house, but her relationship with the rest of the community is uncertain. Adamson, on the other hand, was murdered in 1598 by Thomas Peblis, a relative of Thornton's husband.[38]

However surprising Kirk discipline may seem to modern sensibilities, it held particular importance to Early Modern parishioners. One man objected that his sentence was too lenient, which suggests that he found some comfort, some release from guilt, in the performance of repentance. Several others donated money to the Kirk specifically to buy new sackcloth gowns.[39] Clearly, this was an emotional regime to which many submitted willingly.

It is also worth noting the emotional significance associated with the physical stool of repentance. Some offenders were willing to pay up to £20 Scots to commute their sentence from making repentance on the stool to confessing standing beside the said stool.[40] When Waltir Zownger said that "it becam nocht honest men to sit upon the penitent stule" he associated with the stool the shame of poor character, not merely a one-off offence.[41] This attitude is clearly observed in a feud in the parish of Temple, when Bessie Hutcheson had turned Marion Boyd's family pew, erected by Boyd's late husband, into a stool of repentance for the Kirk. The presbytery's response was lethargic, so Boyd made a bonfire of the new stool. The minister had a new stool made with wood from some other pews, but the affair continued under investigation until his death. The emotional importance of the stool as a place of shame (and that of the family pew as a signal of the deceased's honest reputation) is indicated by the division seen in the parish on account of the use of certain wood to create a stool. Perhaps it is most seen, though, in the decision to continue a feud by that means.[42]

The Reformed Kirk in Early Modern Scotland maintained an emotional regime centred around the rite of repentance. This was a costumed performance, in which everyone in the Kirk had a role to play. Adequate performance of emotions, especially sorrow, could reduce an offender's sentence, whilst refusal or inability to do so could increase that sentence. The formal act of repentance presented and attempted to create an emotional narrative in which isolation, humiliation, and sorrow gave way to

---

[38] Ibid., pp. 50-3.
[39] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 169-71, pp. 143-6.
[40] Ibid., pp. 136-7.
[41] Fleming, *Register*, I, pp. 387-9.
[42] Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 137-8.

forgiveness, joy, and gratitude. The primary means of punishment within the Kirk was shame which, though applied in the same manner as in a civil context, had a more positive connotation. Where discipline was resented, or perceived as unjust, offenders sometimes responded in anger. Sometimes penitents gave way to amusement on the stool, or otherwise disrupted the penitential narrative, and were disciplined for so doing. However, Kirk discipline was a strong enough part of the emotional community of the parish for the stool itself to develop a degree of emotional agency.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Baxter, R., *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter: With a Life of the Author and a Critical Examination of His Writings, vol. XII*, ed. William Orme (London, 1830)

Cameron, J. K. (ed.), *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1972)

Fleming, D. H. (ed.), *Register of the Congregation of St Andrews, vol. I* (Edinburgh, 1889)

Henderson, G. D (ed.), *The Scots Confession 1560* (Edinburgh, 1960)

Todd, M. (ed.), *The Perth Kirk Session Books 1577-1590* (Edinburgh, 2012)

Secondary Sources

C. Coleborne and P. N. Stearns, 'Institutional Records: A Comment', in K. Barclay et al. (eds), *Sources for the History of Emotions* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 92–98

Langley, C. R., '"In the Execution of His Office": Lay Officials and the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Discipline in Scotland, c. 1600-1660', *The Seventeenth Century*, 33 (2018), 497–512

Nash, D. and A.-M. Kilday, *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain 1600–1900* (London, 2010)

Reddy, W. M., *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001)

Ryrie, A., *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013)

The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, New King James Version (Nashville, 1982)

Todd, M., *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (London, 2002)

Zhao, H., '"Holy Shame Shall Warm My Heart": Shame and Protestant Emotions in Early Modern Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 18 (2021), 1–21

The Fenian Dynamite Campaign (1881-1885): A Success?

KIERAN HUTCHINSON

Kieran Hutchinson is a fourth-year Single Honours History student and has contributed as a peer-reviewer to the AHR for two successive years. He enjoys studying military history, deciding to write his dissertation on battles in the First Scottish War of Independence. Upon graduating, he is unsure of what his next step will be – but history will surely remain a key interest.[1]

The Fenian dynamite campaign was the first urban bombing campaign in history – carried out by Irish-American Fenians between 1881 and 1885.[2] The campaign consisted of a series of dynamite attacks across Britain, mainly targeting symbolic locations such as the House of Commons and Westminster. Due to the nature of the attacks, civilians often ended up being victims of the explosive blasts – thus leading many historians such as Shane Kenna to term this a "terrorist campaign".[3] The campaign was sustained by two Irish-nationalist organisations: the Clan na Gael and the Skirmishers – who were a small splinter group of the Clan, based around Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa.[4] Not all Irish-American Fenians supported the movement, however, as many favoured a more honourable form of warfare – such as between two armies. This is encapsulated by James Stephens, the founder of Fenianism, who described the terrorist methods to be "the wildest, the lowest and the most wicked conception of the national movement".[5] Evaluating the success of the campaign depends on the goals of the organisations administering the attacks. These were numerous, from the Skirmishers' specific goal of getting the Clan to join the movement, to the more general aim of securing Irish independence from Britain. Thus, these various goals must be analysed in terms of their success separately – in order to reach an overall conclusion. Many historians, for example, Richard Kirkland and Walter Laqueur, have debated the extent to which different elements of the campaign were a success. On balance, it is fair to say that the

---

[1] This essay was written for HI357A: Acts of Terror: Violence and Authority in 19th Century Europe.

[2] S. Kenna, review of N. Whelehan, 'The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867–1900' (2012), *History Ireland*, 21 (2013), 63.

[3] S. Kenna, 'The Fenian Dynamite Campaign and the Irish American Impetus for Dynamite Terror', 1881-1885, *Inquiries Journal*, 3 (2011).

[4] Ibid.

[5] J. Stephens, quoted in *The Special Commission Act, 1888 – Report of the proceedings before the commissioners appointed by the act*, Vol. IV (London, 1890), p. 189.

Fenians were able to achieve some of their short-term political goals – although not the ultimate aim, thus rendering the campaign overall a failure.

The Clerkenwell prison explosion of 1867 – fourteen years before the dynamite campaign began – is hugely significant to understanding the success of the Fenian movement. In an intended rescue mission for the Fenian leader Colonel Ricard O'Sullivan Burke, too much gunpowder had been used in an attempt to create an escape route. This resulted in the destruction of some sixty yards of prison wall, while also devastatingly killing twelve people and injuring over one hundred others.[6] Kirkland believes that the immediate effects of this event were "highly negative" for the Irish nationalist cause – "not least because it had the effect of reducing sympathy among the British working class for the cause of Irish independence".[7] Thus, this rendered the rescue attempt unsuccessful – particularly with the ultimate goal of Irish independence in mind. However, the Clerkenwell explosion also led the then British Prime Minister – William Ewart Gladstone – to publicly state that the event had convinced him to "address the Irish question by means of his declared mission to pacify Ireland."[8] Kenna notes that this "demonstrated how an act of political violence had forced the government to yield ground on the Irish question".[9] Thus, Gladstone's response displayed to the Fenians the potential for success by committing similar acts of terror – except intentional rather than accidental. Some contemporaries in Britain noted the dangers of this, such as Sir Robert Anderson, a Home Office expert on Fenianism, who commented: "they [the British government] could not fail to encourage Fenians to commit crimes of the same character".[10]

Historians of the topic are in agreement that the Clerkenwell explosion was crucial to providing a pattern of success for the dynamite campaign. For instance, Kirkland argues that the event "inadvertently provided a model for a new kind of violent resistance based not on traditional military mobilisation but rather on spectacular, individual acts".[11] Furthermore, Lindsay Clutterbuck takes this a step further, asserting that: "its consequences continue[d] to resonate throughout the twentieth

---

[6] Kenna, 'The Fenian Dynamite Campaign'.

[7] R. Kirkland, '"A Secret, Melodramatic Sort of Conspiracy": The Disreputable Legacies of Fenian Violence in Nineteenth-Century London', *London Journal*, 45 (2020), 39–52, p. 42.

[8] Kenna, 'The Fenian Dynamite Campaign'.

[9] Ibid.

[10] R. Anderson, *Sidelights on the Home Rule movement* (London, 1906), p. 79.

[11] Kirkland, '"A Secret, Melodramatic Sort of Conspiracy"', p. 43.

century".[12] Hence, it is clear that the Clerkenwell explosion was crucial in setting a precedent for the success of future dynamite attacks. Despite turning British people away from the Irish nationalists' cause, it proved to the Fenians that the British government responded in their favour – and thus provided a means to secure independence. Therefore, the Clerkenwell explosion can overall be deemed as an initial success in the story of the Fenian dynamite campaign.

The bombing campaign itself began solely with attacks conducted by the Skirmishers – the smaller group which has separated from the main Clan na Gael. These attacks, however, were "amateurish" and "undermined by limited financial resources".[13] Thus, this initial part of the campaign could be deemed a failure. On the other hand, it is important to note that the main goal of the Skirmishers was to "goad the more financially secure Clan into a similar strategy" – which could be achieved by "capturing headlines".[14] In this sense, the Skirmishers were indeed successful – as per the factual existence of a Fenian bombing campaign. Despite the limited effect of their attacks on gaining independence, they resulted in the Clan launching a stronger campaign. Clutterbuck notes the importance of this: "the bomb attacks of Clan na Gael from October 1883 onwards had the potential to have been far more devastating in terms of human casualties than anything that the Skirmishers were able to carry out ."[15] Thus, it is fair to conclude that the initial dynamite attacks by the Skirmishers were successful.

Once the Clan was involved, the main goal was obvious: achieve Irish independence from Britain. However, this could not immediately or easily be achieved, so the Fenian bombers sought to instil terror into the British public and government – aiming to bring awareness to their cause. As Mackenzie Weinger puts it: "The battle, they suggested with their bombs, would no longer be hidden away in violence in Ireland or debate in America, but brought to the doorstep of any British citizen."[16] One example of this being achieved can be seen through the response of Scottish writer Robert Louis

---

[12] L. Clutterbuck, 'The Progenitors of Terrorism: Russian Revolutionaries or Extreme Irish Republicans?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16 (2004), 154–181, p. 169.

[13] Kenna, review of Whelehan, 'The Dynamiters'.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] M. Weinger, '"To Terrorize the Public Mind": How the British Press Reported the Fenian Dynamite Campaign, 1881–1885', *Journalism History*, 48 (2022), 81-98, p. 82.

Stevenson. He wrote on 2 August 1881: "I am in a mad fury about these explosions. If that is the new world! Damn O'Donovan Rossa; damn him behind and before, above, below, and roundabout … I will pray in earnest, O Lord, if you cannot convert, kindly delete him!"[17] Furthermore, Stevenson directly retaliated to the movement by publishing a tale designed to ridicule Irish nationalism – portraying Fenianism as "thoroughly evil, satanic phenomenon and an indiscriminate foe".[18] Thus, this is clear evidence of the dynamite campaign having a significant impact on an influential member of the British public. Moreover, this suggests that the Fenians were successful in their goal of bringing awareness from the British people to their cause.

The reaction of the British press is another important factor to consider when evaluating the success of the Fenians in spreading panic among the British people. For example, following the first attack on the Salford military barracks in Manchester – which destroyed a butcher's shop and killed a seven-year-old boy – the local media was quick to report the events.[19] The Manchester Guardian reported that the explosion took place "under circumstances so peculiar as to cause considerable apprehension, if not alarm."[20] In addition, the Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser wrote that: "Suspicion is, of course, rife that the outrage is the work of the Fenian organisation … It is just such a senseless and malicious act as characterises the operations of that fraternity, resulting in injury to innocent persons without benefit to the conspirators."[21] Thus, even at the very beginning of the campaign, the media coverage had already begun – and any member of the British public would be unavoidably attracted to the shocking headlines and articles. As Weinger states: "the press framed the campaign as a dramatic threat to the British people".[22] This sums up the reasoning behind using dynamite attacks; which the media coverage helped to be a success. On the other hand, it should be noted that coverage by the British press was not an absolute benefit to the Fenians. For instance, the press – while acknowledging the grave situation – made sure to make it clear that the attacks were a problem which

---

[17] Robert L. S*., Robert Louis Stevenson, Letters to his Family and Friends* (London, 1900), Vol. 1, p. 214-5.

[18] D. Ó Donghaile, '"Parliament is Burning": Dynamite, Terrorism and the English Novel', in P. C. Herman (ed.), *Terrorism and Literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 212–229, p. 213.

[19] Weinger, 'To Terrorize the Public Mind', p. 81.

[20] "The Salford Barracks Outrage. A Boy Killed," *Manchester Guardian*, January 17, 1881.

[21] "The Alarming Explosion at Salford Barracks," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, January 17, 1881.

[22] Weinger, 'To Terrorize the Public Mind', p. 81.

could be overcome. This represents the fact that the media campaign could not be steered in a precise direction. Thus, as Weinger argues: by "framing the shocking news to make their own political message", the press was able to establish the counter-narrative that "Britain would triumph and hold fast to its place in the world—and onto its empire".[23] This was clearly negative to the Fenian cause, as any sympathy for the Irish cause would be turned into anti-Irish and pro-British sentiment. On balance, though, despite the media developing a counter-narrative which hurt the Fenian movement, this was a price worth paying for the benefits of widespread panic – which placed pressure on the British government.

One historian who is heavily critical of the success of the Fenian campaign is Laqueur. For example, he argues that their achievements were "much less striking" than other groups committing political violence in the nineteenth century.[24] Additionally, Laqueur states that the Fenian bombers "almost always bungled their operations" and that "mishaps were frequent".[25] Most historians writing after Laqueur published these views, however, dispute these claims. For example, Clutterbuck asserts that the Clan embarked "on a bombing strategy with a level of professionalism and activity unprecedented in modern Europe".[26] This view is backed up by contemporary evidence, albeit coming from the side of the Fenians. For example, according to O'Donovan Rossa's journal, *United Ireland*, his men were undetectable: "With all their spies and detective agencies in every part of the world, the English government must be unable to get any really valuable information as to the movements of… Irish Republicans. Thousands upon thousands a year are spent upon secret police; and what is the result of it all? Explosions every other week".[27] This suggests that the Fenian bombers were an effective force; so much so that they could not be stopped by British counterterrorism attempts. According to Kenna, there is some truth to the failures of British retaliation – due to the fact that "the idea of secret policing was controversial in Victorian Britain".[28] On the other hand, James Revill argues the opposite: "By the 1890s, however, the skirmishing campaign had stopped, ostensibly because of the countermeasures

---

[23] Ibid*., p.* 83.
[24] W. Laqueur, *Terrorism* (Boston and Toronto, 1977), pp. 12-3.
[25] Ibid*.*
[26] Clutterbuck, 'The Progenitors of Terrorism', p. 159.
[27] *United Ireland*, quoted in Ó Donghaile, "Parliament is Burning", p. 213.
[28] S. Kenna, *War in the Shadows: The Irish-American Fenians who Bombed Victorian Britain* (Sallins, 2014), p. 77.

issued by the security community."[29] In addition, Richard English argues that the Fenians were also "deeply compromised … by treachery and espionage (as they also were by factionalism)."[30] Thus, there were clearly problems within both sides of the conflict – this was the first time such a campaign was carried out after all, and equally the first time the British needed to deal with one. Nevertheless, this does not take away from the overall success of the campaign in terms of bringing awareness to the issue of Irish independence. Kenna is in agreement with this line of argument, stating: "the Fenian campaign signified the first time in British history that the Irish question spread beyond Ireland and affected British urban centres, and sensibilities".[31]

The obvious issue with defining the Fenian dynamite campaign as a "success" is the willingness of the bombers to inflict violence upon innocent civilians for their cause. As Clutterbuck writes: "At best, the perpetrators were reckless or careless to the potential loss of innocent life or at worst, they considered it of little or no consequence to their objective."[32] Moreover, this is reinforced by the fact that the campaign unequivocally did not achieve its ultimate goal – Irish independence. As English asserts: "The Fenians' aim of establishing through their violence an independent and secular government in Ireland was not realized".[33] If independence had been achieved, the destruction which took place as a result of the bombings may have been overlooked by those sympathetic to the Irish cause. This was not the case, however, and all things considered – in the end, little was achieved by the dynamiters.

In conclusion, evaluating the success of the Fenian dynamite campaign must be done through analysis of the various goals of the groups carrying it out. Firstly, the Clerkenwell explosion was evidence of the potential success that the Fenians could attain through the use of dynamite – thus it was a major precursor to the dynamite campaign. In addition, the initial attacks by the Skirmishers may not have been the most influential on their own, however, they were successful in bringing the Clan na Gael into the conflict. Furthermore, the bombing campaign was able to achieve its goal of bringing the issue of Irish independence to the British public. This can clearly be seen through the writings of Stevenson,

---

[29] J. Revill, *Improvised Explosive Devices: The Paradigmatic Weapon of New Wars*, 1st ed. (2016), p. 25.
[30] R. English, review of S. Kenna, 'War in the Shadows: The Irish-American Fenians who Bombed Victorian Britain' (2014), *Irish Historical Studies*, 41 (2017), 150–152, p. 151.
[31] Kenna, 'The Fenian Dynamite Campaign'.
[32] Clutterbuck, 'The Progenitors of Terrorism', p. 166.
[33] English, review of Kenna, 'War in the Shadows', p. 151.

as well as the coverage it received by the British press. Moreover, despite early criticism in the historiography from Laqueur, later historians such as Clutterbuck and Kenna have made a strong case for the validity of the movement in terms of having an impact on Britain. On balance, however, the primary goal of Irish independence was not achieved – and thus the campaign can ultimately be deemed a failure. Although, this does not deny the huge impact that the bombing attacks had on Victorian Britain. Kirkland shares this view, he surmises: "Did the dynamite war, then, achieve any purpose? To a large extent it did not, although the fear it provoked in London kept the cause of radical Ireland to the forefront of political life, a strategy which was unpleasant but undeniably effective."[34]

---

[34] Kirkland, 'A Secret, Melodramatic Sort of Conspiracy', p. 45.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

"The Alarming Explosion at Salford Barracks," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 17 January 1881

"The Salford Barracks Outrage. A Boy Killed," *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1881

Anderson, R., *Sidelights on the Home Rule movement* (London, 1906)

Stephens, J., quoted in *The Special Commission Act, 1888 – Report of the proceedings before the commissioners appointed by the act*, Vol. IV (London, 1890)

Stevenson, R. L., *Robert Louis Stevenson, Letters to his Family and Friends*, Vol. 1 (London, 1900)

United Ireland, quoted in Donghaile, D. Ó, '"Parliament is Burning": Dynamite, Terrorism and the English Novel', in P. C. Herman (ed.), *Terrorism and Literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 212-229

Secondary Sources

Clutterbuck, L., 'The Progenitors of Terrorism: Russian Revolutionaries or Extreme Irish Republicans?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16:1 (2004), 154–181

Donghaile, D. Ó, '"Parliament is Burning": Dynamite, Terrorism and the English Novel', in P. C. Herman (ed.), *Terrorism and Literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 212-229

English, R., review of Kenna, S., 'War in the Shadows: The Irish-American Fenians who Bombed Victorian Britain' (2014), *Irish Historical Studies*, 41 (2017), 150-152

Kenna, S., 'The Fenian Dynamite Campaign and the Irish American Impetus for Dynamite Terror', 1881-1885, *Inquiries Journal*, 3 (2011)

Kenna, S., review of N. Whelehan, 'The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867–1900' (2012), *History Ireland*, 21 (2013)

Kenna, S., *War in the Shadows: The Irish-American Fenians who Bombed Victorian Britain* (Sallins, 2014)

Kirkland, R., '"A Secret, Melodramatic Sort of Conspiracy": The Disreputable Legacies of Fenian Violence in Nineteenth-Century London', *London Journal*, 45 (2020), 39–52

Laqueur, W., *Terrorism* (Boston and Toronto, 1977)

Revill, J., *Improvised Explosive Devices: The Paradigmatic Weapon of New Wars*, 1st ed. (2016)

Weinger, M., '"To Terrorize the Public Mind": How the British Press Reported the Fenian Dynamite Campaign, 1881–1885', *Journalism History*, 48 (2022), 81-98

Lincoln: The Great Emancipator?

KRISTEN NICOLSON

Kristen Nicolson is a fourth-year Single Honours History student and managing editor of the Aberdeen Historical Review. Her main interests are in the fields of Scottish history and American Political history. She recently completed her dissertation on health inequalities in Edinburgh between c. 1945-1980. Upon graduation she will undertake a Master's in Public Policy at the University of Stirling and intends to pursue a career in civil service.[1]

Abraham Lincoln's historical reputation as the "Great Emancipator" is both formidable and contestable. Lincoln was an anti-slavery Republican, not an abolitionist; his aim was to save the Union endangered by the civil war and the expansion of slavery. His Emancipation Proclamations of 1862 and 1863 were wartime executive actions that threatened slavery's continuation in the rebellious Confederate states— where most of the nation's four million enslaved people lived. He personally detested slavery but also expressed conventional racial attitudes toward the superiority of whites over African-Americans. To his modern critics, Lincoln's views on race seem closely aligned with that of pro-slavery advocates. Historians too have highlighted the agency of others—black soldiers, abolitionists, and fugitive slaves— in forcing the federal government and president to effect abolition. Few historians would declare Lincoln the sole agent of abolition, but, equally, few would deny him any agency in hastening political change. Iconoclastic popular history aiming to undermine Lincoln's historical agency in favour of others' is as culpable of over-simplification as any heroic representation of Lincoln as the "Great Emancipator". Together, a false binary emerges that ignores the complexity of historical causation, relies for evidence on a highly selective range of primary sources, and prioritises political purpose over historical truth.

The historiographical debate can be divided into three broad categories: (a) those who consider Lincoln to be the "Great Emancipator"; (b) revisionists advocating a black self-emancipation thesis; and (c) post-revisionists who have synthesised both interpretations. Eric Foner's *The Fiery Trial* (2010), in particular, considers a multitude of agents involved in achieving emancipation which, if organised in a hierarchical structure, indicates Congress to be the most important agent in actually ending slavery.[2]

---

[1] This essay was written for HI356J: Thinking History.
[2] See E. Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010).

These different interpretations do not deny Lincoln's historical agency or ignore the agency of others and differ in the emphasis they attribute to primary agency with regard to emancipation.

In contrast, popular representations of Lincoln elevate the agency of one agent to the exclusion of others and disregard the complexities of historical interpretation. Promoting Lincoln as the "Great Emancipator" provides a mono-causal explanation of political history unfitting of professional historical writing. Furthermore, it seamlessly connects personal political motivation with historical agency and ignores the questions of power, conflicts of interest, and wider processes underpinning all political conflicts. Lincoln did not free the slaves, literally or metaphorically. Moreover, Lincoln's critics view him as a captive of his times, morally speaking, and contend that his indifference to race perpetuated inequalities. His presidential commitment to emancipation sprang from military exigencies rather than a genuine concern for enslaved people. To suggest Lincoln did not care flies in the face of historiography, however, and Lincoln's own anti-slavery views. Popular representations of Lincoln will inevitably resort to labels to make a political argument. But if historians think this is fair ground for reputable analysis, they are entirely mistaken.

The 1619 Project, for example, nearly did just that. Ran by *The New York Times*, the project aimed to "reframe American history" by placing the experiences of enslaved African-Americans at the centre of a historical narrative and effectively side-lined Lincoln's agency. It focused on Lincoln's White House meeting with black abolitionists on 14 August 1862—the first-ever conference between a US president and African-Americans. Lincoln told his visitors that they were of "different races". Pressed by his "guests" on emancipation, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes, Lincoln "opposed black equality", furthermore "blaming them [African-Americans] for the war" and being an "obstacle to national unity"; which was the reason he supported a scheme of colonisation.[3] Lincoln scholar Allen C. Guelzo deplored this "outrageous, lying slander".[4] Guelzo's case is not without merit: Hannah-Jones failed to acknowledge the drafting of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation a month before the historic White House meeting, failed to explain that colonisation was voluntary or that Lincoln quickly

---

[3] N. Hannah-Jones et al., 'The 1619 Project', *The New York Times Magazine* (14 August 2019).

[4] A. C. Guelzo, 'The 1619 Project's Outrageous, Lying Slander of Abe Lincoln', *The Heritage Foundation* (5 March 2020), <https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/commentary/the-1619-projects-outrageous-lying-slander-abe-lincoln> [Accessed 23/02/22].

abandoned it or that Lincoln's worries over racial tensions reflected growing social conflict between black and white workers in eastern cities. In short, Hannah-Jones does not contextualise Lincoln's own views with reference to wider public attitudes on matters of racial inequality and has little positive to say about Lincoln's role in ending slavery.[5]

Beyond inadequate contextualisation, Guelzo emphasised that Hannah-Jones's selective interpretation judged Lincoln by modern-day standards with regard to race. If Hannah-Jones's aim was to destroy the myth of Lincoln the "Great Emancipator" then she certainly succeeded but at the cost of marginalising his historical agency in the *Project's* school-level programmes. At best, the *Project's* mission to establish a "New Origin" story elevated historical narrative over historical analysis. At worst, it obscured context and eliminated key evidence from discussion. Similar criticisms were delivered at the *Project's* treatment of the American Revolution. In both cases there is a pattern: historians of the American Revolution and Civil War denounced the *Project* for initially excluding them and for slipshod fact-checking.[6] Most worrying is the marginalisation of historical research methodology. Anyone can conduct "extensive historical research", Sydney Goggins wrote defending of the *Project*.[7] The treatment of Lincoln, the *Project's* critics might suggest, would seem to confirm that is the case.

Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of 22 September 1862 changed the Civil War from a war to preserve the Union to one to end slavery. Issued by presidential authority after the battle of Antietam, the proclamation declared that enslaved peoples in rebellious states would be free. The second Emancipation Proclamation confirmed enslaved peoples' freedom on 1 January 1863. Historians generally agree that in military terms, the proclamations targeted slavery as a Confederate resource by inciting slave rebellions and extending Congress's definition of fugitive slaves as "contraband" property. They were also intended to discourage British and French intervention in support of the Confederacy. It

---

[5] Hannah-Jones et al., 'The 1619 Project'.

[6] *The 1619 Project* was later adapted into a book, published in 2021, that did include contributions from historians. L. M. Harris, 'I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me.', *Politico* (6 March 2020) <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248> [Accessed 23/02/22].

[7] S. Goggins, 'Reshaping public memory in *the 1619 project*: rhetorical interventions against selective forgetting', *Museums and Social Issues*, 14 (2019), 60–73.

was not "an act of humanity to the slaves", Carwardine concludes, even though Lincoln was also signalling the "slaves" freedom as one of the *purposes* of war".[8]

Lincoln's modern critics stress that the proclamations did not in reality "free" any slaves nor apply to the whole United States.[9] However, the president did not possess constitutional authority to abolish slavery, and, even in the Northern states, many still believed that slavery was a matter for the states, not Congress. Support for abolition was growing in 1862 but was not widespread until 1864.[10] Lincoln's emancipatory actions alienated Southerners and conservative Republicans, but also gained the support of many African-Americans, such as Frederick Douglass.[11]

Furthermore, Lincoln's critics have implied that limited emancipation reflected the *personal* wishes of Lincoln— thus doubting his commitment to abolition. Certainly, the proclamations are consistent with the political pragmatism he expressed to white abolitionist Horace Greeley one week after the White House meeting with black abolitionists:

> My paramount objective *is* to save the Union, and *is not* either to save or destroy slavery . . . What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forebear, I forebear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union.

When quoting this passage, Lincoln's critics often omit the following explanation of his political rationale: "I have stated here my purpose according to my view of *official* duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed *personal* wish that all men could be free".[12] The Emancipation Proclamation, then, did not reflect Lincoln's *personal* desire to see the end of slavery but reflected his *official* responsibilities as president to win the war. Had Lincoln acted in accordance with his personal views on slavery he would not only risk losing public and political support, but the war also. He had no intention of declaring himself the primary agent of freedom in 1862.

So, what were Lincoln's personal views on slavery and race? Those who have denounced the "Great Emancipator" image (notably Lerone Bennett Jr.) have frequently conflated discussions of

---

[8] R. J. Carwardine, *Lincoln* (Harlow, 2003), p. 199, p. 201, p. 216.

[9] I. Berlin, 'Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning', in M. Perman (ed.), *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1998), pp. 288-97.

[10] R. P. Basler (ed.), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, 1953), pp. 74-75.

[11] B. Dirck, 'Changing Perspectives on Lincoln, Race, and Slavery', *OAH Magazine of History*, 21 (2007), 9–12.

[12] D. H. Donald et al., *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 2001), pp. 331-2.

Lincoln's views on slavery and race in order to present Lincoln as a captive of his time undeserving of the accolade.[13] It is more constructive to consider these topics separately.

Lincoln considered slavery as the "sum of all villanies" and was "naturally anti-slavery". As a Congressman in 1849, he proposed a bill to abolish slavery in Washington DC, where it continued until April 1862, when Lincoln signed into law a Congressional act.[14] Lincoln was not an abolitionist. His famous pro-union anti-slavery "House Divided" speech of 1858 opposed the further extension of slavery rather than its immediate abolition. Consistently since the late 1830s, Lincoln believed the "promulgation of abolition doctrines" would increase tensions between pro- and anti-slavery factions within the party and nation.[15] Before the Civil War, Lincoln needed to appeal to voters in western states like Illinois and border states like Kentucky, where the majority of voters were either pro-slavery or tolerant of slavery.

Pragmatism, rather than principle, led Lincoln into the presidency where he aimed to "devise" an attack on the institution of slavery while protecting the "fragile coalition that sustained his administration".[16] As president, Lincoln was concerned by the practicalities of "immediate" emancipation, fearing a public backlash and the "race war" it might entail, Guelzo argues.[17] And yet, Lincoln was fully aware of the false "liberty" proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln personally interpreted the Declaration's commitment to equality literally: all men were created equal and equally entitled to the rights of Life and Liberty. But he must "bite [his] lip" he declared in 1855.[18] Lincoln the "Great Emancipator" was not so much a captive of his times, as a politician of his times.

On race, specifically racial equality, Lincoln's attitudes were more in keeping with contemporary views than the progressive "Great Emancipator" image. While he detested slavery, Lincoln did not advocate racial equality. Lincoln explicitly stated his position in 1858: "I am not, nor have I ever been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the black and

---

[13] Dirck, 'Changing Perspectives', p. 11.
[14] A. C. Guelzo, 'Lincoln, Race and Slavery: A Biographical Overview', *OAH Magazine of History*, 21 (2007), 14–17.
[15] Basler (ed.), *Collected Works,* pp. 74-5.
[16] Donald et al., *Civil War*, p. 330.
[17] Guelzo, 'Lincoln', p. 14.
[18] Basler (ed.), *Collected Works*, p. 255, p. 320.

white races". Lincoln's colonisation scheme should be seen as a pre-emptive compromise that would enable African-Americans to exercise their future citizenship without impeding on the "comfort" of whites. W. E. B. Du Bois thought Lincoln's attitudes towards racial equality typical of a "man [who] was less than perfect" and made him all the more deserving of the "Great Emancipator" accolade for transcending conventions to rectify inequalities by first ending slavery.[19]

Racial inequalities were painfully clear when African-Americans enlisted to fight for freedom in the Civil War—"freedom not just for a race but for a nation". Despite the willingness of African-Americans to enlist in the Union army (some 186,000 soldiers did so by the end of the war), Susan-Mary Grant argues that racial prejudice remained unchanged. Furthermore, the demands of unpaid African-American soldiers were largely ignored, and, unable to support their families back home, many were left destitute and subject to racially motivated attacks. While public sentiment deemed the African-American soldiers good enough to die for *their* nation, they were not good enough to become equal citizens united under *one nation*.

Lincoln never equated black military service with civil rights. Freedom for African-American soldiers did not translate into equal pay or protection under the law (which later followed). While Grant rightly argues that the Civil War presented a lost opportunity for reconstruction "on the basis of full racial equality", public attitudes made this nearly impossible.[20] Always sensitive to public opinion, had Lincoln advocated black civil rights there would have been a massive public backlash, especially in the border states. Ultimately, regarding race, Lincoln was a man of his time, progressive only by mid-nineteenth-century standards, Carwardine concludes, though his "gradualism served a progressive purpose" in persuading others eventually to accept abolition in 1865.[21]

Does that mean Lincoln was not the primary agent of black freedom? It would seem so, according to some historians of slavery, if by primary agent is meant sole or most important agency. Vincent Harding, an advocate of the black self-emancipation thesis, openly dismisses the idea of Lincoln

---

[19] Dirck, 'Changing Perspectives', p. 10.

[20] S. M. Grant, 'Fighting for Freedom: African-American Soldiers in the Civil War', in S. M. Grant and B. H. Reid (eds), *Themes of the American Civil War: The War Between the States* (New York, 2010), pp. 185–208.

[21] Carwardine, *Lincoln*, p. 238, p. 310.

being the "primary agent of freedom".[22] The thesis of self-emancipation embodies enslaved peoples as agents of spiritual freedom, who through fugitivity and passive resistance were able to alleviate the realities of their enslavement but could not physically free themselves from the institution of slavery. Ira Berlin did not advocate a thesis of self-emancipation yet argued that fugitives were "prime movers" of emancipation because they prompted "legislators, military officers, and the president" to consider emancipation.[23]

Equally, these agents could have chosen to ignore fugitives, but the army in particular became an agent of emancipation. African-American soldiers "alone did not win the war", Glatthaar argues, but their participation "may have made the difference between a union victory and stalemate or defeat" in 1864 and 1865.[24] Their courageous service demonstrated to many racially prejudiced Americans that they were somehow "worthy" of emancipation, with 37,000 dying in service.[25] Moreover, anti-slavery officers often refused to return fugitives and defied the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act for military reasons as well as sympathy with the abolitionist cause.[26] "Contraband" slaves, consequently, were themselves agents of change, as Barbara Fields argued, as much as Union soldiers fighting to preserve the Union.[27]

The question in relation to Lincoln, therefore, should be: what did Lincoln do to harness the various agents discussed in this essay? On these grounds, James MacPherson confidently rejected the "fashionable answer" that enslaved peoples emancipated themselves and returned to the "Great Emancipator" thesis.[28] He found consistency in Lincoln's position from the outset of the war. Lincoln was adamant that any policies to preserve the Union were of his own accord and authority. The Emancipation Proclamation demonstrated Lincoln's leadership in applying presidential authority within constitutional bounds to tackle slavery itself. Lincoln did only what he thought he was legally able to

---

[22] V. Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York, 1981), pp. 219-41.

[23] Berlin, 'Who Freed the Slaves?, pp. 288-89.

[24] J. T. Glatthaar, 'Black Glory: The African American Role in Union Victory' in M. Perman (ed.), *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1998), pp. 297–310.

[25] D. Turley, 'Slavery and Emancipation: The African-American Experience during the Civil War', in S. M. Grant and B. H. Reid (eds), *Themes of the American Civil War: The War Between the States* (New York, 2010), pp. 249-66.

[26] S. M. Grant, *The War for a Nation: The American Civil War* (New York, 2006), p. 113.

[27] I. Berlin and B. J. Fields et al., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 21, p. 46, p. 53, p. p54, p. 69.

[28] J. M. McPherson, 'Who Freed the Slaves?', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 139 (1995), 1–10.

do. Lincoln the pragmatist resisted pressure from the abolitionists until his re-election in 1864. Only then did Lincoln believe there was a majority opinion in Congress to push for abolition.

Lincoln's main problem was to resolve the question as to how democracies fight wars, as Peter Parish contended when enduring terrible carnage on the battlefield.[29] Lincoln changed Union war aims, seeking a "New Birth of Freedom" for Americans. His re-election in 1864 committed the federal government to complete abolition through Congressional legislation and constitutional amendment. (Congress had outlawed slavery in the Northwest territories in 1787 and in 1820 its western extension under the Missouri Compromise, while northern states had implemented gradual emancipation since 1780). No one, including Lincoln, believed that abolition could be achieved by executive action alone. But he joined abolitionists in attacking conservative Republicans and Union Democrats who still protested that slavery was a states' rights matter under the Tenth Amendment. Lincoln's clumsy proposal for compensated emancipation was intended to win over conservatives but was unanimously rejected by his cabinet.[30] The Republican Party remained internally divided and in conflict with the Democrats on the Thirteenth Amendment right up till its final passage through Congress on 31 January 1865.[31] Even then, the amendment required ratification by three-quarters of the US states.

Perhaps the most devastating criticism of Lincoln is that in the final months of his life, he failed to advance Reconstruction by including provisions to support freed people at the war's conclusion. On the question of securing African-American civil rights, he failed also. While preoccupied with the military campaigns, Lincoln's lack of initiative could be attributed to his preference for restoring the seceded states to the Union as quickly as possible, as Foner suggests.[32] Had he not been assassinated he would have been obliged to attend to Reconstruction once the Congress resumed and the Southern states applied for readmission. We can only speculate whether Lincoln would have supported the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments (1868, 1870). Lincoln certainly liberated enslaved people; whether he freed African-Americans from oppression is quite another matter.

---

[29] P. J. Parish, *The American Civil War* (New York, 1975), p. 630, p. 646.
[30] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, p. 315.
[31] E. Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History* (New York, 2005), p. 542.
[32] Foner, *Fiery Trial*, pp. 316-7.

Historians who prioritise one historical agency at the expense of others risk presenting an incomplete version of events. Their preoccupations with the personal motivations that lay behind Lincoln's presidential decisions are partly driven by historiographical revisionism and partly by political agendas. Abraham Lincoln did not "free the slaves". Neither did enslaved people who freed themselves by their own agency free America of slavery. Slavery was abolished by the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment in 1865. Beyond these facts, historical agency offers a host of agents—president, enslaved people, politicians, Congress, public opinion, soldiers—and the job of the historian is to explain how, what, why and when each contributed. All were primary agents because each effected change. To elevate one above another risks simplification. Would slavery have ended without Lincoln? All we can state with certainty is that the course of history would have been different had someone else been president. Lincoln was a "great" president not because of his personal views but his political actions: he kept the nation together during a civil war; he was a "Great Emancipator" because he helped turn that war into one to abolish slavery. Lincoln played a major part in the "one truly revolutionary act" of the Civil War – abolition.[33]

---

[33] Parish, *Civil War*, p. 650.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Basler, R. P. (ed.), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, 1953)

Secondary Sources

Berlin, I., 'Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning', in M. Perman (ed.), *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1998), pp. 288-97

Berlin, I., Fields, B. J., Miller, S. F., Reidy, J. P., Rowland, L. S., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1992)

Carwardine, R. J., *Lincoln* (Harlow, 2003)

Dirck, B., 'Changing Perspectives on Lincoln, Race, and Slavery', *OAH Magazine of History*, 21 (2007), 9-12

Donald, D. H., Baker, J. H., Holt, M. F., *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 2001)

Foner, E., *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010)

Foner, E., *Give Me Liberty!: An American History* (New York, 2005)

Glatthaar, J. T., 'Black Glory: The African American Role in Union Victory' in M. Perman (ed.), *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1998), pp. 297-310

Goggins, S., 'Reshaping public memory in *the 1619 project*: rhetorical interventions against selective forgetting', *Museums and Social Issues*, 14 (2019), 60-73

Grant, S. M., 'Fighting for Freedom: African-American Soldiers in the Civil War', in S. M. Grant and B. H. Reid (eds), *Themes of the American Civil War: The War Between the States* (New York, 2010), pp. 185-208

Grant, S. M., *The War for a Nation: The American Civil War* (New York, 2006)

Guelzo, A. C., 'The 1619 Project's Outrageous, Lying Slander of Abe Lincoln', *The Heritage Foundation* (5 March 2020) [https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/commentary/the-1619-projects-outrageous-lying-slander-abe-lincoln] [Accessed 23/02/22]

Guelzo, A. C., 'Lincoln, Race and Slavery: A Biographical Overview', *OAH Magazine of History*, 21 (2007), 14-17

Hannah-Jones, N., et al., 'The 1619 Project', *The New York Times Magazine* (14 August 2019) <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>

Harding, V., *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York, 1981)

Harris, L. M., 'I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me.', *Politico* (6 March 2020) [https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248] (Accessed 23/02/22)

McPherson, J. M., 'Who Freed the Slaves?', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 139 (1995), 1-10

Parish, P. J., *The American Civil War* (New York, 1975)

Turley, D., 'Slavery and Emancipation: The African-American Experience during the Civil War', in S. M. Grant and B. H. Reid (eds), *Themes of the American Civil War: The War Between the States* (New York, 2010), pp. 249-66

The Symbolism of the Islamic Veil: Misconceptions and Reality

CERWYSS MCKAY

Cerwyss McKay is a third-year single Honours History student and the Submissions Editor of the Aberdeen Historical Review. She enjoys studying the history of the modern Middle East through the lens of gender history, particularly the fall of the Ottoman Empire and incoming British colonialism. After completing her undergraduate degree, she would like to continue her studies and pursue a career in academia.[1]

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the transformation of the symbolic nature of the Islamic veiling tradition. Leila Ahmed discusses how, as a consequence of colonialism, the veil has come to be seen as a symbol of Middle Eastern backwardness and Islam's oppression of women. However, this Western perspective ignores Muslim women who have chosen to veil and who see the veil as a symbol of empowerment. Ashraf Zahedi analyses the religious revival in many Middle Eastern countries in response to Westernisation; such as Egypt in the 1970s. In this context, many Muslim women chose to re-veil as a symbol of resistance. Moreover, Zahedi and Lama Abu Odeh both provide arguments centred around the agency that veiling can provide for women and the empowering nature of the veil. The issue of whether veiling oppresses or empowers women is complex and is a highly contested topic which still resonates today. Iran is currently embroiled in controversy surrounding their veiling laws. It is far from the first time that the issue of the veil has been the centre of debates on Islamic oppression. It is important to note that the hijab is the headscarf with which Westerners are most familiar, however, there are numerous variations of the veil. Islamic women will wear the Niqab, the Burqa, the Chador and the Dupatta. This essay will use the term veil as a generalisation to address the social, political and postcolonial realities of the veil in the Middle East.

Western perceptions centre around the belief that the veil, thus Islam oppresses women. The West saw traditional Islamic culture as "backwards", unveiling was thereby a symbol of modernity. Ahmed agrees when she states that Americans view Islamic people as "backwards, uncivilised peoples

---

[1] This essay was written for HI307B: The Making of the Modern Middle East.

totally incapable of rational conduct"[2] This idea of cultural superiority is deeply rooted in colonial practices. For example, Behiery describes how in French Algeria, the French colonisers firmly believed in their superiority.[3] In the twentieth century, the French imposed forced unveiling to oppress the indigenous Islamic culture and to enforce Western ideas of "modernisation". The French argued that they were seeking the liberation of women to justify their colonial interests and the occupation of Algeria. However, their use of forced unveiling took away the freedom of choice and so did not liberate Islamic women from their supposed oppression.

Westernisers believed in their inherent superiority and their perceived right to impose their culture upon those whom they deemed inferior. This belief was rooted in colonial prejudices and assumptions rather than factual evidence. Some Westerners would argue that the veil without a doubt enables the oppression of Islamic women, however, they fail to understand that this is far from a clear black-and-white issue. For example, the veil can be a status symbol as in Yemen only servants and non-Muslims do not wear a veil. Additionally, it can symbolise devotion to Islam; the more a woman covers her body the greater her devotion to Islam.[4] Western perceptions of the veil are simplistic and highlight the West's lack of desire to fully understand veiling as a religious practice. This lack of understanding extends to Western feminists who view the veil as an abuser; they believe it symbolises the brainwashing of Islamic women and their subsequent oppression.[5] However, this view assumes that Western and Middle Eastern women have shared experiences which is not the case. Women in different countries will have completely different experiences regarding oppression. Therefore, Western women cannot presume to understand the experiences or values of Islamic women and do not have the right to impose their opinion and culture.

Veiling as a practice has evolved into a political symbol of anti-colonialism. El Guindi states that modern women who choose to wear some form of headscarf seek "liberation from imposed,

---

[2] L. Ahmed, 'Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem', *Feminist Studies,* 8 (1982), 521–534, p. 522.
[3] V. Behiery, 'A Short History of the (Muslim) Veil', *Implicit Religion,* 16 (2013), 387–415, p. 390.
[4] V. Hoffman, 'Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 19 (1987), 23–50, p. 24.
[5] N. J. Hirschmann, 'Western Feminism, Eastern Veiling, and the Question of Free Agency', *Constellations,* 5 (1998), 345–368, p. 349.

imported identities, consumerist behaviours, and an increasingly materialist culture".[6] The veil is a simple, undecorated piece of clothing which demonstrates a rejection of materialism and the encroachment of western values. Furthermore, the British occupation of Egypt created a divide as the lower and middle classes saw Western culture as a symbol of occupation. As a consequence, they clung to tradition and veiling. However, the upper classes benefitted more from Westernisation and adopted Western values and culture to demonstrate their modernity.[7] Colonialism is not limited to occupation, the importation of Western culture is also a form of colonialism as it can result in the destruction of indigenous, traditional cultures. In this context, the veil became a form of resistance as women were able to express their hostility towards Westernisation and reclaim their Islamic identity.

Unlike Iran, Egypt does not have a history of state control of Islamic dress and veiling. The Egyptian government discouraged veiling in the 1970s, however, they did not enforce or regulate women's choices.[8] As a result, the popularity of veiling rose and it became part of a grass-roots activist movement which was introduced by young university students. They rejected Western culture and viewed veiling as a symbol of a renewed Islamic cultural identity. Furthermore, the French policy regarding the veil in Algeria sparked a religious revival. According to Yeğenoğlu women were seen as "the true guardians of their authentic traditions and identity".[9] The Islamic patriarchy believed that veiled women needed to be protected to preserve Islam, thus the veil became a weapon in the battle against colonialism. Due to the veil's visibility, it became a clear marker of resistance to Westernisation and represents women's freedom to act and rebel. Women who have the freedom to choose whether to veil therefore have the agency to resist.

In her monograph, Karam offers examples of Islamic perspectives regarding the veil. She discusses Al-Sha'rawi's belief that women need to veil because it prevents broken marriages as the

---

[6] F. El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance,* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 184.

[7] B. Baron, 'Unveiling in Early Twentieth Egypt: Practical and Symbolic Considerations', *Middle Eastern Studies,* 25 (1989), 370–386, p. 373.

[8] F. El Guindi, 'Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement', *Social Problems,* 28 (1981), 465–485, p. 129.

[9] M. Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 141.

husband will only ever see his wife unveiled.[10] The husband will find his wife attractive even as she ages as he cannot compare her to other women. This is an interesting perspective that focuses on the importance of the veil in preserving domestic life. However, it is a patriarchal point of view, forgoing the idea that Muslim men do not wear a veil. A wife may find her husband unattractive upon comparing him to others but this is not addressed. He argues for separate spheres for men and women, women must stay at home whereas men must go out and work to support the family. In this instance, the veil is the symbol of women's invisibility and contributes to the oppression of women as their movement within society and the workplace is restricted. Al-Sha'rawi represents the traditional Islamic male perspective in which women's movement in society is controlled by the patriarchy. This is the view that the West associates with the veil. However, not all Islamic men follow this line of thought; Al-Ghazali is more accepting of women's role in public life. He states that Western clothes "inflame evil instincts against her",[11] he is arguing that Western clothes do not allow women dignity and respect as they are too revealing. Western clothes are perceived to be immodest and degrading as they encourage men to view women's bodies as sexual objects.[12] In the same way as the West views the veil as oppressing women so too does the East view Western clothes as oppressive. Highlighting the Islamic ideal of modesty for both men and women. Islam unlike Christianity does not ignore women's sexuality but instead believes that sex should be reserved for marriage. Consequently, men and women must dress modestly to prevent attracting sexual desire from strangers; the veil is considered the best way for women to be modest.

Abu Huraira, one of the prophet's messengers, quotes Muhammad as stating, "the adultery of the eye is the lustful look".[13] Veiling covers the object of temptation, the female body, and so women are seen for their mental capabilities rather than physical attributes. Safina Qazim, an Islamic feminist, back this up when she argues that women should wear the veil because "it forces men to deal with a veiled woman on an equal footing".[14] She argues that the veil gives Muslim women the freedom to join public life and that it creates a sense of dignity for the woman wearing it. However, not all Islamic

---

[10] A. M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1998), p. 183.

[11] Ibid., p. 188.

[12] L. A. Odeh, 'Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference', *Feminist Review,* 43 (1993), 26–37, p. 27.

[13] Imam Muslim, (trans.) Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, *Sahih Muslim 46: 5.1.*

[14] Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State,* p. 220.

feminists hold the same views. Fatima Mernissi argues that the veil highlights women's "illegal position on male territory by means of a mask".[15] She believes that the veil symbolises women's relegation to the home and inability to move freely in society. In this instance, the veil hides women from society, rendering them invisible. However, rather than being a symbol of oppression, the veil can be seen as a symbol of the separation of men and women.[16] There is an assumption in the West that this separation is oppressive, but in reality, it provides a space for women to exchange views with each other without male interference. Thus, the veil empowers women and gives them the freedom to be completely themselves.

An unveiled woman who chooses to wear a Western style of dress risks harassment on the streets as she may be accused of sexual immorality. In large cities such as Cairo, Muslim women have to ride busy buses and trains to travel to work or school, by doing so they are surrounded by men and risk harassment. In contrast, the veil gives women the freedom to move around in public spaces without fear of harassment or damage to their reputation; if a woman is veiled men will treat her with more respect. Lama states that if a woman wearing a veil was harassed, she would be more likely to stand up for herself than if she was wearing Western clothing. "Her sense of 'untouchability' of her body is usually very strong".[17] The veil gives women the confidence to stand up for themselves; they feel secure in their beliefs and values and refuse to allow men to belittle them. Furthermore, the general public will behave more favourably towards a veiled woman as she is viewed as a pious, respectable woman. Harassment will thus be seen as disrespectful. Moreover, the visibility of the veil helps to create a community of women in the workforce as these women have shared struggles and face the same pressures.[18] The veil allows them to join the workforce and be more independent while also highlighting their devotion to Islam and tradition. This challenges Western beliefs as rather than oppressing women, the veil is providing them with the opportunity to go to school and join the workforce, empowering and liberating Muslim women.

---

[15] Hirschmann, 'Western Feminism', p. 351.
[16] Ahmed, 'Western Ethnocentrism', p. 523.
[17] Odeh, 'Post-Colonial Feminism', p. 29.
[18] Hirschmann, 'Western Feminism', p. 358.

It is important to note that protection offered by the veil is limited as Hammami argues that it did not protect women from violence during the First Intifada. She states that casualty statistics indicate that soldiers were not discriminatory regarding their victims and a headscarf would not prevent an attack.[19] Although veiling does offer women protection from day-to-day harassment it does not prevent brutality from soldiers. Hammami states that this has led to the argument that "wearing a headscarf will stop the incident from bringing shame on the family".[20] This reinforces the Islamic value of sexual honour and modesty as women will be blamed for the attack if they are not veiled. In this instance, the veil offers protection from accusations regarding sexual decency and honour in the aftermath of an attack and protects a woman's reputation. Any accusation of this kind is exceptionally dangerous for women as they often result in an honour killing. The UNPF estimated that approximately 5,000 women and girls are murdered every year in honour killings.[21] Honour killings are defined by Faqir as "the killing of women for suspected deviation from sexual norms imposed by society".[22] Women who are believed to have broken the honour code and disgraced her family are violently punished. Any member of her family or community can carry out this punishment. Although wearing the veil does not provide absolute protection from this violence, it does aid a women's reputation and limits potential rumours.

As an item of clothing, the veil itself is not oppressive. However, it has been used and manipulated by the Islamic patriarchy as a means to oppress women. For example, in Iran in 1939, Reza Shah abolished the veil and his soldiers forcibly removed women's veils. He took women's choices away and according to Zahedi; it was viewed as "an assault on Islamic culture and Muslim women"[23] due to the compulsory nature of this unveiling. Many women were not ready to unveil as for them the veil provided a source of comfort and pride and so did not leave their homes for fear of soldiers forcibly removing their veils. These women became more isolated as they were forbidden from entering public

---

[19] R. Hammami, 'Women, the Hijab and the Intifada', *Middle East Report,* 164 (1990), 24–78, p. 26.
[20] Ibid.
[21] UNFPA, 'Lives Together, Worlds Apart: Men and Women in a Time of Change', *State of World Population 2000*, (2000).
[22] F. Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', *Third World Quarterly,* 22 (2001), 62–82, p. 69.
[23] A. Zahedi, 'Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies,* 3 (2007), 75–98, p. 82.

spaces such as restaurants while wearing a veil.[24] This highlights that forced unveiling did not liberate Muslim women, in actuality, it was just as oppressive as forced veiling. Just like Western colonisers, the shah saw veiling as the symbol of backwardness and believed that he had the right to decide whether women were allowed to veil. The 1979 revolution saw this decision reversed and the veil was made compulsory. Veiled women were no longer shunned and were given the opportunity to re-enter society; greater numbers of these women became educated and were able to join the workforce. The revolution could be seen as the liberation of Islamic women who were now free to observe Islamic traditions. However, women who had chosen to unveil before the revolution became the targets of discrimination and abuse. The revolution dictated that all women must veil and those who did not would be excluded from political, economic and social spheres. The male patriarchy used the veil as a tool to control women's dress and inclusion in society, just as the veil was used to resist colonialism so too was it used to oppress Islamic women.

To summarise, this essay has argued that the veil itself is not a symbol of oppression. Instead, it empowers women and provides the opportunity to move more freely in society. The West's misguided perception was shaped by their sense of superiority and belief that the veil symbolises Middle Eastern backwardness. However, some Islamic feminists such as Qazim argue that the veil empowers women as it forces men to see them for their minds rather than their physical attributes. The veil can also be seen as a symbol of resistance to colonialism as it was a visible marker of traditional Islamic values, thus allowing women to become politically active. However, the veil has been used by the Islamic patriarchy in ways which have contributed to the oppression of women. Neither forced veiling nor unveiling gives women the choice over their clothing; both attempt to regulate women's public activities. The veil itself is just a piece of clothing that symbolises the Islamic faith and does not contribute to the oppression of women. Therefore, it is the ways in which the veil has been manipulated by the East and West that has led to the oppression of Muslim women.

---

[24] Ibid., p. 82.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

UNFPA, 'Lives Together, Worlds Apart: Men and Women in a Time of Change', *State of World Population 2000*, (2000), <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/state-world-population-2000 [Accessed 20/02/2023]

Muslim, Imam, (trans.) Siddiqui, Abdul Hamid, *Sahih Muslim 46: 5.1,* <https://sunnah.com/muslim> [Accessed 23/02/2023]

Secondary Sources

Ahmed, L., 'Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem', *Feminist Studies,* 8:3 (1982), 521-534

Ahmed, L., *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)

Baron, B., 'Unveiling in Early Twentieth Egypt: Practical and Symbolic Considerations', *Middle Eastern Studies,* 25:3 (1989), 370-386

Behiery, V., 'A Short History of the (Muslim) Veil', *Implicit Religion,* 16:4 (2013), 387- 415

Behiery, V., 'Bans on Muslim Facial Veiling in Europe and Canada: A Cultural History of Vision Perspective', *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture* 19.6 (2013), 775–793

Ed-Din, N. Z., 'Removing the Veil and Veiling: Lectures and Reflections Towards Women's Liberation and Social Reform in the Islamic World', *Women's Studies International Forum,* 5:2 (1982), 221–226

El Guindi, F., 'Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement', *Social Problems,* 28:4 (1981), 465-485

El Guindi, F., *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance* (Oxford: Berg, 1999)

Hammami, R., 'Women, the Hijab and the Intifada', *Middle East Report,* 164 (1990), 24-78

Hirschmann, N. J., 'Western Feminism, Eastern Veiling, and the Question of Free Agency', *Constellations,* 5:3, (1998), 345-368

Hoffman, V., 'Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 19:1 (1987), 23-50

Kahf, M., *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman from Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999)

Karam, A. M., *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (Hampshire: Basingstoke Macmillan 1998)

Odeh, L. A., 'Post-Colonial Feminism and the Veil: Thinking the Difference', *Feminist Review,* 43:1 (1993), 26-37

Olson, E. A., 'Muslim Identity and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey: 'The Headscarf Dispute'', *Anthropological Quarterly,* 58:4 (1985), 161–171

Yeğenoğlu, M., *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Zahedi, A., 'Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies,* 3.3 (2007), 75-98

"More Than Binding Men's Wounds": Comparing the Experiences of Nurses on the Eastern and Western Fronts through Selected Memoirs

JUDE CHRISTISON

Jude Christison is a fourth-year single honours history student and the Editorial Assistant of the Aberdeen Historical Review. Jude's main interests lie in gender and race history, and she recently completed her dissertation on African American women's contributions to the Harlem Renaissance. Upon graduation, she will begin a Master's in Information Management and Preservation at the University of Glasgow, hoping to start a career as an archivist working in the heritage sector.[1]

There has been a significant focus on the importance of nursing in providing medical treatment and emotional comfort to soldiers across Western literature. However, the prominence of women's involvement in the geopolitical watershed that was the First World War has often been disregarded across the East. The historians Christine Hallett and Margaret Darrow both discuss nurses' experiences in the West and to what extent the war affected them.[2] Claire Tylee introduced the study of nurses on the Eastern Front, arguing that they had significantly contrasting experiences to those in the West.[3] However, Laurie Stoff has written the only monograph discussing the participation of nurses in the East.[4] Throughout her book she argues that nurses on the Eastern Front experienced considerably harsher conditions, which were incomparable to that of the West. This essay will take a thematic approach in arguing nurses had drastically contrasting experiences across both Fronts, although nursing in the East was vastly more dangerous. Through the role of nursing, women began to break down primitive views on gender identities throughout the Great War.

The memoirs chosen will be used to critique the limited secondary literature available in English. The memoirs of Florence Farmborough, Tatania Alexinsky, Mary Britnieva, and Violetta Thurstan have been selected as each woman contributes greatly towards the story of nursing across the

---

[1] This essay was written for HI304T: World War One: International Perspectives.

[2] C. E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (Manchester, 2009). M. Darrow, *French Women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front* (Oxford, 2000).

[3] C. M. Tylee, 'The Spectacle of War: Photographs of the Russian front by Florence Farmborough', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8 (1997), 65–80.

[4] L. Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More Than Binding Men's Wounds* (Kansas, 2015).

Eastern Front. Furthermore, these sources are complete and have been translated into English, which is rare for memoirs published in the East. As for the Western memoirs selected, each woman provides critical information leading to a comprehensive comparison of nurses' experiences across both Fronts.

However, it should be noted that there are limitations to using a memoir as a primary source. Firstly, memoirs are less historically accurate than a diary as there is a time lapse between when the events took place and the recording of such events, thus relying on memory can make them a less reliable source. Memoirs also contain personal bias, often presenting one viewpoint or interpretation of events. Despite this, they are valuable sources for historians when paired with secondary literature as they allow us to understand what a person felt and how they behaved in a given period. In this essay, memoirs have been selected as key primary sources because they provide insight into major world events, such as the First World War, from an individual's perspective.

The structure will follow four themes: recruitment and mobilisation, diversity of women, location and conditions, and finally how the history of nursing is being threatened. These themes were chosen as they were the four topics most widely discussed within the memoirs and secondary literature. Thus, they act as a stepping-stone for comparing nurses' experiences on both Fronts. Furthermore, this essay will cover the years ranging from the outbreak of war in 1914 to the February Revolution in 1917. The Russian Revolution can be studied as a new era for nursing and therefore should be considered an individual subject. Thus, taking this essay beyond February 1917 would overshadow nurses' influential role during the First World War.

Women on the Western Front were part of a professionalised nursing service. In Britain, for example, the Nurses Association was created in 1887 to unite women who sought professional recognition in their field. In the Netherlands, military nursing had always been a male profession. However, when Holland chose to mobilise its army on the 1 August 1914 to prevent an invasion, women were able to volunteer to serve in military hospitals. Folmer, a health officer for the French army, explained how "women beside a sickbed were as logical and as natural as a man on the battlefield".[5] The historians Leo van Bergen and Catharina Bakker support this idea through the explanation of the

---

[5] H. Folmer, 'De verpleegster in het Militaire Hospitaal', *Militair Geneeskundig Tijdschrift*, 14 (1910), 176.

public outcry in 1914.[6] Soldiers began to demand that the duty to fight should include the right to suitable medical treatment. Thus, the First World War was a major stepping-stone towards nursing as an occupation, gaining women professional recognition in their field.

However, in Russia, nursing remained "charitable" work throughout the war. The charitability of this work refers to women's selfless act to join the cause as nurses in the East received very little respect or recognition, rather than a financial aspect such as the lack of pay which this essay will go on to address. This did not mean Russian women were less eager to volunteer than Western women which is a common concept that will be challenged in this section.

In Russia, the notion of a nurse was to act as a "mother figure" who regarded wounded soldiers as her "boys." By using the metaphor of a "mother" nursing fell under the boundaries of maternal work. Therefore, it was believed that nurses should not be paid for their duties; much like a mother did not expect to receive money to simply care for her children. José Roussel-Lépine discussed women's nursing in the First World War as "simply instinctive" and compared this work to a mother's care for her son.[7] In Farmborough's memoirs, she confirms this concept by discussing the romanticism of her role. She explains how the idea of soldiers as her "boys" began to construct the image of nurses as patriotic protectors, much like a mother's role.[8] The historian Laurie Stoff supports this concept as before the war the only quality Russian nurses were believed to require for the role was a "good heart".[9] She furthers the idea that although nursing in Russia became a charitable duty it did not make women less eager to volunteer. This was because anyone with the correct temperament could successfully perform the duties of a nurse, similarly, to becoming a devoted mother. As nursing was not professionalised in the East, Russian nurses did not receive recognition for the role they played as it was simply seen as an extension of their household duties.

Moreover, a comparison of the mobilisation figures from the East and West reveals that the charitable nature of nursing did not affect Russian women's eagerness to volunteer. At the outbreak of

---

[6] L. van Bergen and C. Bakker, 'Dutch Nurses and the Great War: on Care Giving and Gender', *First World War Studies,* 11 (2020), 107–22, pp. 109-111.

[7] J. Roussel-Lépine, 'Une Ambulance de Gare', *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 12 (1916), 667–668.

[8] F. Farmborough, *Nurse at the Russian Front: a Diary, 1914-18* (London, 1974), p. 52.

[9] Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War,* p. 39.

the war Russia already had 4,000 trained nurses. Additionally, in the first month of the war, 30,000 women signed up to join Russia's Sisters of Mercy.[10] The Sisters of Mercy were a women's organisation in operation to train nurses to take care of sick and wounded men. During the war, many Sisters worked under Red Cross auspices or in conjunction with other organisations such as the All-Russian Zemstvo Union (Zemskii Soiuz), which was a civil society organisation that supported sick and injured soldiers. The Sisters of Mercy later became an important part of the women's emancipation movement in Russia. In contrast to the figures from the East, France only had 100 trained nurses at the outbreak. In Britain, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Hospital had less than 300 women volunteer within the first year of the war.[11] Although nursing in Russia remained charitable work, this did not deter women from enlisting.

Bergen explores the case in the Netherlands further by focusing on figures published by the Dutch Red Cross. He explains how their delayed preparation was an "absolute disaster for the country".[12] In contrast, Violetta Thurstan's memoir comments on how nurses across the Eastern Front viewed the war as a "romantic pursuit" and a form of adventure.[13] This partly explains why the Sisters of Mercy became so attractive to Russian women. The daughter of the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, Meriel Buchanan, was quoted explaining how wearing the uniform of the Sisters of Mercy "became a veritable status symbol", verifying their influence on Russian women.[14] Therefore, the importance of this organisation impelled women to in essence join their "sisters" to proudly serve their country, highlighting an example of how vital nationalism was to Eastern mobilisation during the First World War.

By 1914 the Russian Sisters of Mercy had become a popular organisation in which women formed unbreakable bonds through "sisterhood". Britnieva's memoir discusses the strength of the

---

[10] C. E. Hallett, 'Russian Romances: Emotionalism and Spirituality in the Writings of "Eastern Front" Nurses, 1914–1918', *Nursing History Review*, 17 (2009), 101–28, p. 21.
[11] Hallett, *Containing Trauma,* pp. 59-71.
[12] L. van Bergen, '"Would it not be better to just stop?" Dutch Medical Aid in World War One', *First World War Studies*, 2 (2011), 165–194, p. 178.
[13] V. Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Columns: Being the Journal of an English Sister in Belgium and Russia* (London, 1915), p. 34.
[14] M. Buchanan, *The City of Trouble* (New York, 1918), p. 120.

Sisters, which collectively guided nurses in the East through the horrors of war.[15] Stoff supports the concept of "sisterhood" by describing the character, spirituality and endurance of nurses who worked on the Eastern Front. These aspects all originated from the indestructible bonds that formed through the Sisters of Mercy, which symbolised female patriotism.[16]

In contrast, on the Western Front, the representation of nursing as a collective was believed to endanger the perception of a national war effort. In memoirs written across the West, women were encouraged to suppress the concept of "sisterhood" in order to fight the same war as their male counterparts. To receive any kind of equality or respect for their role in the war, nurses began to commemorate the male perspective over their own. In Darrow's monograph on French nurses, she explains that on the Western Front, a women's "emotional suffering acted as a tribute to [the soldier's] sacrifice".[17] Darrow believes this was why relationships between nurses are not commonly observed in Western memoirs as individuality became the comprehensive approach towards writing accounts. In contrast, the memoirs published in the East heavily focus on the connection shaped by the Sisters of Mercy and the positive effect these connections had on nurses.

Hence, nursing as charitable work did not deter Russian women from volunteering. Nurses across both Fronts had distinctively contrasted experiences due to the vastly different forms of training and recruitment. However, it was Eastern women that suffered as the practice of nursing remained charitable. This ultimately meant that Russian nurses did not receive the same level of respect within society as nurses in the West.

A great variety of women from different classes within society volunteered as nurses during the First World War. In Russia, there was a false concept that nurses were primarily "society ladies turned sisters", which is challenged by Tylee.[18] She believes that nurses hailed from every social class and profession. This was made possible due to the monthly income of between 25 to 50 Roubles that Russian

---

[15] M. Britnieva, *One Women's Story* (London, 1934), pp. 64-67.

[16] L. Stoff, *Military Affairs in Russia's Great War and Revolution, 1914-1922. Book 1, Military Experiences* (Bloomington, 2018), p. 282.

[17] Darrow, *French Women and the First World War,* p. 161.

[18] Tylee, 'The Spectacle of War: Photographs', p. 65.

nurses received for their service. The introduction of a salary became crucial as it allowed working-class women to enlist without the concern of funding.

In contrast, nurses from the West were often upper-middle class and educated. These nurses became defined as "new women" due to their modernised role in the war effort. However, for working-class women, there was very little opportunity to join as only fully trained nurses received an income. Thus, without financial aid there became a lack of incentive to enlist. Louise Deletang, a French nurse; supports this concept in her memoir. She appeals to all working-class women explaining that "We have come to do our duty… if only I were rich!"[19] Darrow confirms this by discussing the general feeling of exclusion that working-class women experienced.[20] It becomes clear how nurses on the Western Front had contrasting experiences through the disparity of class and the exclusion of working women from nursing.

Furthermore, religion was another central feature of nursing that affected women in both the East and West. Distinctively, it was one matter that was similar for both Fronts. To join the honoured Sisters of Mercy women had to practice Christianity; much like the Red Cross on the Western Front, thus the majority of nurses were Christian.

The Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna supported the influence of Christianity: "We must try to ease the suffering of the sick through Christian words and prayers."[21] If a woman practised any religion aside from Christianity, she could still become a "volunteer sister" working alongside women with a variety of faiths. Thus, Russia was more inclusive of cultural aspects such as religion and class than the West. This poses a question not yet asked in the secondary literature: whether the inclusive nature in the East could be linked to the higher numbers of Russian women that volunteered as nurses during the outbreak?

To answer this there must be a focus on the significant contributions to the war effort made by the Orthodox Church. This included mobilising vast numbers of resources, assisting war victims, and

---

[19] L. Deletang, *Journal d'une Ouvrière 1914-1916* (Paris, 1917), p. 213.
[20] Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 134.
[21] M. Soroka and C. A. Rudd, *Becoming a Romanov: Grand Duchess Elena of Russia and Her World, 1807-1873* (Oxford, 2016), p. 158.

providing spiritual consolation.[22] By contributing such donations, the church proved it continued to find support and adherence even in the midst of war.

However, the Tsarist administration long resisted national mobilisation. Tsar Nicholas II wanted to maintain control over wartime medical services. He, therefore, decided to put his cousin, Prince Alexander Ol'denburgskii, in command.[23] Prince Alexander (along with the Tsar) did not welcome any religious-based charity to aid the wartime medical services. This caused many problems for the Russian Sisters of Mercy as they were a Christian-established charity organisation. Although they were willing to provide their services to help the war effort they were told to hold off, as there was initial official resistance to the involvement in the front zone of non-Red Cross organisations, delaying Russian medical services significantly.

This is one major difference between nurses' experiences of the war. Eastern nurses were originally prevented from performing their duties due to Tsar Nicholas' wish to control all wartime decision-making. In contrast, Western nurses were encouraged from the outset to serve their country proudly, with no interruptions or interventions from the government. Although, it is still important to understand that Russia was more inclusive towards the religion and class of those who served, both nurses and soldiers. This inclusivity highlights an all-embracing approach to the diversity of men and women who fought on the Eastern Front and partly explains the link between why there were higher numbers of Russian women that volunteered as nurses.

On both the Eastern and Western Fronts nurses worked in a variety of locations and conditions. Firstly, nurses in the East often served very close to the fighting. In contrast, Western medical personnel were instructed to remain a "safe" distance from the fighting, which was considered to be three to four miles.[24] This was much harder to enforce on the Eastern Front due to the frequent shifting of battle lines. In the East, it was rarely known what was considered the front or the rear of the battlefield therefore it

---

[22] S. M. Kenworthy, 'The Mobilisation of Piety: Monasticism and the Great War in Russia, 1914-1916', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* 52 (2004), 388–401, p. 390.

[23] S. Grant, 'Nursing and the Public Health Legacies of the Russian Revolution', *American Journal of Public Health*, 107 (2017), 1725–1730.

[24] A. S. Fell and C. E. Hallett, *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2013), p. 26.

was almost impossible for nurses and medical staff to remain the required "safe" distance away from any fighting.

In comparison, nurses on the Western Front performed their duties in stationary hospitals often at a much safer distance. Stationary hospitals were effective as trench warfare was fought in a more stagnant form in the West. This is supported by Hallett as she describes how nurses worked in permanent casualty clearing stations and field hospitals. This allowed patients to be moved "down the line" to base hospitals and then to convalescent hospitals' "at home".[25] Across the Western Front medical staff had originally planned to evacuate the wounded immediately by train. However, during the war, this was found to be less practical in treating injured soldiers. Thus, there are clear differences between the location of nurses on both Fronts. Nursing in the East became known for more extreme and dangerous conditions when compared to the Western Front.

The major contrast between trench warfare was the stationary hospitals in the West and the so-called flying columns on the Eastern Front. These flying columns (Letchuka) were highly mobile, allowing nurses to relocate quickly and more often to follow their troops.[26] The Letchuka were particularly effective transport units permitting medical personnel to work under perilous conditions. Nurses could establish dressing stations much closer to the front line than Western nurses and were able to carry out triage for the wounded a great deal quicker. This was also important as soldiers, therefore, had a better chance at survival, as their wounds could be attended to immediately.

Despite the major advantages created by the Letchuka, there were also significant dangers that the medical transport units faced. The flying columns could often be sent into the trenches or even onto the battlefield to perform medical care. Working so close to the front line was often very frightening for nurses. There are many examples recorded in memoirs of nurses facing dangerous conditions such as Alexinsky's transport unit becoming a target of an enemy attack on the way to a hospital. She explained how "the booming of the guns never ceases" and that nurses were constantly reminded that "the enemy was extremely near".[27] Alexinsky recalls how many of her friends were injured during the attack as they

---

[25] C. E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp 78-81.
[26] Stoff, *Military Affairs in Russia's Great War and Revolution,* p. 135.
[27] T. Alexinsky, *With the Russian Wounded* (London, 1916), p. 58.

treated wounded soldiers in a medical hut. In Chelakova's memoir, she compares the working conditions as similar to an "earthquake", revealing just how close nurses were to the Front.[28] This proves the exposure women on the Eastern Front were subject to, providing evidence that they had much harsher experiences than nurses in the West.

Furthermore, part of a nurse's training was to learn about the conditions she may experience while serving on the front line. The secondary literature on nursing in the First World War primarily covers training in the West. Therefore, it is important to ask whether Russian nurses received less training than those on the Western Front.

This question stems from Thurstan's memoir, which comments on the comparison between Russian and British nurses. The Russian nurse writes that although many of the Sisters of Mercy she encountered throughout the war were excellent, their approach to work was rather haphazard in contrast to British nurses.[29] This can be explained through the Russian nursing training program. By September 1914 the Red Cross began to recognise that more nurses were required immediately and in much larger numbers. Therefore, they decided to shorten the preparation period from the normal year-long course down to just two months.[30] Although nurses in Russia had a shorter training period, they were educated to prepare for more violent warfare and thus attend to harsher wounds.[31]

In comparison, nurses on the Western Front often received longer periods of training but focused on modern warfare that would create "humanitarian" gunshot wounds.[32] These wounds were small, clean, and rarely fatal. As fighting developed, this led to many nurses across the West being unprepared for how warfare developed throughout the First World War. This is proven in Mme Colombel's memoir when she explains her job in a "dream hospital" quickly turned into a nightmare as her staff did not receive the appropriate training to treat "gaping holes, shattered jaws and crushed legs".[33] Further, the

---

[28] N. Chelakova, 'Iz zapisok sestry miloserdiia,' *Novoe russkoe slovo*, 4 (1969).

[29] Thurstan, *Field Hospital and Flying Columns,* pp. 24-25.

[30] P. Gatrell, 'The Epic and the Domestic: Women and War in Russia 1914-1917', in G. Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War* (New York, 2022), pp. 198–215, p. 202.

[31] Ibid., p. 159.

[32] J. Purvis, *British Women of the Eastern Front: War, Writing and Experiences in Serbia and Russia, 1914-20* (London, 2016), p. 47.

[33] Mme Colombel, *Journal d'une Infirmière d'Arras* (Paris, 1916), p. 13.

Scottish nurse Ishobel Ross discussed the terrible wounds she witnessed with Dr Elsie Inglis, explaining the disturbing sight of bodies "strewn with bullets and daggers".[34]

Hence, the different training methods created another contrasting experience for nurses on both Fronts. The question of "did Russian nurses receive less training" can be answered very simply. However, this did not mean that the quality of the training provided was worse than that of Western nurses. Russian nurses used their knowledge of the injuries witnessed during the Crimean war to their advantage. Therefore, a new generation of Russian nurses were well-instructed and prepared for the realities of modern warfare.

There are many reasons why nurses of the First World War are truly inspirational heroes. They overcame insurmountable odds, endured gender-based prejudice and helped a devastating number of wounded soldiers. Each of these courageous women were devoted to the true calling of nursing: saving human life, no matter the cost. However, the history of nursing barely survived the war for several reasons. In the East, memoirs were subjected to heavy scrutiny before they could be printed. Memoirs that deviated from the Bolshevik party line of an "imperialist war" became illegal and banned from publication.[35] Thus, there is significantly less primary literature than in the West. Although, as previously mentioned, memoirs written on the Western Front focused on the soldiers' stories, as the view of a masculinised war persisted, which also limits what we can learn about the emotions or frame of mind of Western nurses.

Overall, women fought to remain an essential part of the story of the war effort. Their endeavours were threatened to be removed from history and replaced solely by male accounts. Further, the masculinised sphere of war became obscured by the separation of gender conceptions that had been ingrained into society many years before the war.[36] As women began to challenge this through their part in the medical service, gender roles and behaviours experienced significant mutations throughout and

---

[34] I. Ross, *Little Grey Partridge: First World War of Ishobel Ross* (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 70.

[35] D. Goldman et al., *Women Writers and the Great War* (New York, 1995), p. 184.

[36] S. R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, 1999), p. 245.

after the war. Thus, women not only had to fight to participate but they were also forced to defend the stories they had produced to commemorate their experiences.

In conclusion, through the comparison of the recruitment process, location, conditions, types of women, and their stories, this essay has shown that nurses across the East and Western Fronts experienced very diverse accounts of the war. Overall, it can be argued that through the exploration of memoirs, nurses in the East experienced a much harsher war. Firstly, their profession remained charitable, meaning they did not receive proper recognition for their services. Secondly, the harsh conditions of the Eastern Front along with the constant shift in battle lines placed nurses in constant danger. After the war, their stories were almost eradicated due to the political doctrine enforced by the Bolsheviks after the success of the October Revolution. The importance of this discussion cannot be overlooked as the First World War should be recognised as a turning point for women in the twentieth century. The war established women in part of wider discussions surrounding politics, culture, and society; slowly transgressing social norms that had been considered stable for generations.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Alexinsky, T., *With the Russian Wounded* (London, 1916)

Britnieva, M., *One Women's Story* (London, 1934)

Buchanan, M., The *City of Trouble* (New York, 1918)

Colombel, Mme, *Journal d'une Infirmière d'Arras* (Paris, 1916)

Deletang, L., *Journal d'une Ouvrière 1914-1916* (Paris, 1917)

Farmborough, F., *Nurse at the Russian Front: a diary, 1914-18* (London, 1974)

Folmer, H., 'De verpleegster in het Militaire Hospitaal', *Militair Geneeskundig Tijdschrift*, 14 (1910), 176

Ross, I., *Little Grey Partridge: First World War of Ishobel Ross* (Aberdeen, 1988)

Roussel-Lépine, J., 'Une Ambulance de Gare', *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 12 (1916), 667–668

Thurstan, V., *Field Hospital and Flying Columns: Being the Journal of an English Sister in Belgium and Russia* (London, 1915)

Secondary sources

van Bergen, L. and C. Bakker, 'Dutch Nurses and the Great War: on Care Giving and Gender', *First World War Studies,* 11 (2020), 107–122

van Bergen, L., '"Would it not be better to just stop?" Dutch Medical Aid in World War One', *First World War Studies,* 2 (2011), 165–194

Chelakova, N., "Iz zapisok sestry miloserdiia," *Novoe russkoe slovo*, 4 (1969)

Darrow, M., *French Women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front* (Oxford, 2000)

Engel, B., *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge, 2004)

Fell, A. S. and C. E. Hallett, *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Oxford, 2013)

Gatrell, P., 'The Epic and the Domestic: Women and War in Russia 1914-1917', in G. Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War* (New York, 2022), pp. 198–215

Grant, S., 'Nursing and the Public Health Legacies of the Russian Revolution', *American Journal of Public Health*, 107 (2017), 1725–1730

Grayzel, S. R., *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, 1999)

Goldman, D. et al., *Women Writers and the Great War* (New York, 1995)

Hallett, C. E., *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War* (Manchester, 2009)

_____, *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (Manchester, 2016)

_____, 'Russian Romances: Emotionalism and Spirituality in the Writings of 'Eastern Front' Nurses, 1914–1918', *Nursing History Review*, 17 (2009), 101–28

Kenworthy, S. M., 'The Mobilisation of Piety: Monasticism and the Great War in Russia, 1914-1916', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* 52 (2004), 388–401

Leneman, L., *In the Service of Life: the Story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (Edinburgh, 1994)

Murray, E., 'Russian Nurses: From the Tsarist Sister of Mercy to the Soviet Comrade Nurse. A Case Study of Absence of Migration of Nursing Knowledge and Skills', *Nursing Inquiry*, 11 (2004), 130–37

Purvis, J., *British Women of the Eastern Front: War, Writing and Experiences in Serbia and Russia, 1914-20* (London, 2016)

Stockdale, M., *Mobilizing the Russian Nation: Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World War* (Cambridge, 2016)

Soroka, M. and C. A. Rudd, *Becoming a Romanov: Grand Duchess Elena of Russia and Her World, 1807-1873* (Oxford, 2016)

Stoff, L., et al (eds.), *Military affairs in Russia's Great War and Revolution, 1914-1922. Book 1, Military Experiences* (Bloomington, 2018)

Stoff, L., *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More Than Binding Men's Wounds* (Kansas, 2015)

Tylee, C. M., 'The Spectacle of War: Photographs of the Russian front by Florence Farmborough', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8 (1997), 65–80