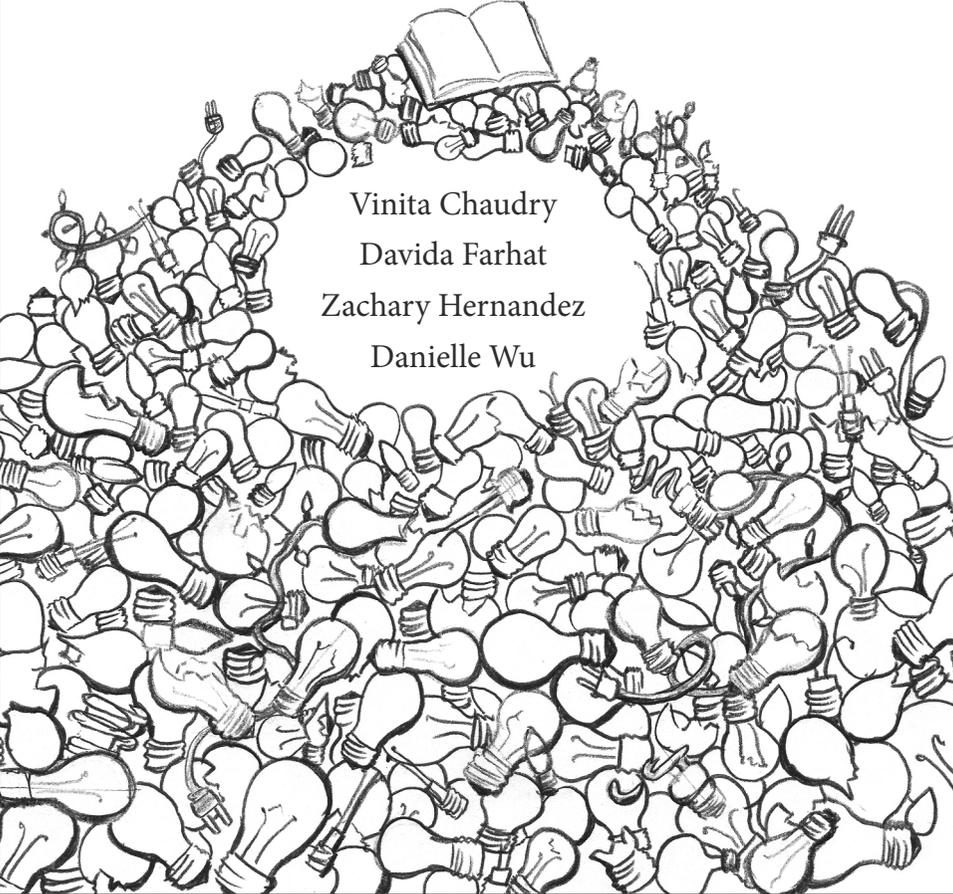Washington University in St. Louis

THE
INQUIRY

The Journal of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship

Vinita Chaudry

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editor's note

All the articles in this journal are formatted in the Chicago style, even social sciences papers that would normally use APA formatting. This was done for the sake of uniformity (to make the journal as professional looking as possible by giving it one style) and readability (to make the journal easier to read by not abruptly changing styles from article to article, particularly in regards for nonacademic readers, who constitute a significant portion of the journal's audience). We wish to make social science professionals who may read this journal aware of this fact and why this formatting was used. Aside from normal copyediting and uniform formatting, the content of these articles was not changed in any way.

Dr. Gerald Early
Faculty Director of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program
Director of the Center for the Humanities
Washington University in St. Louis

foreword

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship is a competitive national program that provides generous research stipends and individualized guidance for selected students from the end of their sophomore year, in order to encourage them to continue on to graduate school in the humanities or social sciences. Every year since 1993, the senior Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship cohort at Washington University in St. Louis have published their culminating research in the official fellowship journal, *The Inquiry*.

This year, the the 2014 Mellon Mays cohort will discuss our various projects, which, despite their different geographies, have connecting themes. Each of the four research projects are rooted in studies of contemporary times, which causes the issues raised to contain both pertinence and a sense of urgency. As the contemporary world is characterized by "globalization," a rapid homogenization in urban planning and standardization of living practices, how can we disrupt this seemingly unilateral direction of development? The collection of articles in this issue of *The Inquiry* examines the impending effects of globalization for several communities around the world who remain underrepresented, and yet find ways to navigate or subvert authoritarian systems.

Topics will include how immigrants and refugees navigate the US healthcare system, queer South Asian identity in New York City, competing modes of urban transportation in Bogotá, and forms of Feminist nationalism in *Vogue China;* issues that ultimately touch on the effects of increasingly market economies on the individual identity, as well as the effects of global tourism on the collective identity.

Vinita Chaudhry
Davida Farhat
Zachary Hernandez
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Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Cohort
Washington University in St. Louis Class of 2014

Serving the Desi Queer Community: SALGA & South Asian Queer Organizing in New York City

By VINITA CHAUDHRY

Abstract: This paper uses ethnography, including participant observation and thirteen in-depth interviews, to explore the experiences of individuals involved with SALGA, a South Asian queer organizing. Aiming to "serve the desi queer community," SALGA provides monthly support group meetings, collaborates with other queer organizations, throws parties, organizes political and activist events in the City, and more. This paper analyzes SALGA's place in the larger South Asian queer community in the City, and its place within a larger political economy of queer organizing in the United States. Using the framework of a queer diaspora, the paper explores not only the ways the organization holds the radical political potential to challenge such normative structures as heteronormativity, racism, and globalization, but also the ways SALGA falls within such structures. Ethnographic data reveals the ways marginalized areas of the South Asian queer community in New York City, particularly working-class and transgender populations, often feel excluded from SALGA spaces. This paper looks closely at these exclusions and organizational limitations and connects them to global economic inequalities. Ultimately, this paper argues that the larger political economy of queer organizing in the United States, specifically, the distribution of funds to various types of organizations, limits the radical potential of community-based organizing for queer communities of color.

On a sunny June afternoon in Queens, the energy and excitement in the air was palpable. After marching a few blocks in a local neighborhood, SALGA[1] board members and allies retired to our tent at the Queens Pride festival. A number of LGBTQ organizations handed out free promotional materials and sold drinks, clothing, jewelry, and SALGA sold T-shirts to local community members, while fielding questions or comments about the organization. People asked about SALGA's renowned par-

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[1] SALGA once stood for South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, but board members recently decided to refer to SALGA as a "South Asian queer organization" in order to be inclusive of identities outside of lesbian and gay identities.

ties, its mission and leadership, while making comments about the past and present work of the organization. As a newly hired intern, I sat quietly, observing board and community members interacting. One significant encounter that afternoon was when a South Asian man with no teeth who presumably spoke no English came to the table. He did not say anything to me or the other board members, but rather just smiled and started to take a T-shirt. After board members tried first in English, then in Hindi, to explain to the man that the shirt cost fifteen dollars, the man reluctantly walked away.

The board members and I all assumed this man was an older "uncle," or South Asian community elder, who must have misunderstood the mission and work of SALGA. As a group, we seemed to agree that the man was not a part of the South Asian queer [2] community that SALGA serves. Although there was no clear way to determine the man's sexual or gender identity, the man's inability to communicate, disheveled look, and awkwardness, led to our assumption that he was not queer. He seemed a lower class immigrant, common in Queens, a New York City borough with a rich history of migration and settlement. The man likely descended from working-class South Asian immigrants who are, as historian Vivek Bald writes, "at the margins of US immigration history."[3] Our assumptions about this man and his intentions are inextricably tied to the relationship between (South Asian) queer organizing and class privilege.

Our perception then reveals a great deal about how SALGA imagines its spaces and its organizing. Philosopher Linda Alcoff writes about the significance of perception in understanding racialized bodies. According to Alcoff's understanding of racial embodiment, "we perceive ourselves, others, the world, and the relation between them, in and through the grids of intelligibility that exist in our culture, and which we have embodied, which, in effect, we are. But this perception occurs, for the most part… at a subconscious or preconscious bodily level."[4] The SALGA board members at the festival and I perceived that this brown man with no teeth could not be interested in SALGA. Our pre-conscious assumption, based on his class and inability to communicate, reveals the "grids of intelligibility" through which SALGA perceives reality, demonstrating how the act of exclusion, particularly on the basis of class, is replicated by SALGA. I open with this particular anecdote from my ethnographic fieldwork to illustrate the ways

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[2] I use "queer" here and throughout my paper, to denote all sexual and gender identities that fall outside of a hetero- or gender-normative context, including, but not limited to, identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or and questioning.

[3] Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), Kindle.

[4] Nikki Sullivan, "Queer Race," in A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 76.

hegemonic political and economic processes intersect to influence the politics and representation of SALGA, whose aims to serve New York's South Asian queer community may be compromised as a result.

This paper explores the culturally specific queer spaces that SALGA creates using a queer diasporic framework as a lens. Through such a framework, I examine the ways SALGA can radically challenge assumptions about such categories as gender, sexuality, race, and class, as well as the ways SALGA may be reinscribing these normative concepts. In understanding the ways queer diasporic organizations like SALGA can re-establish hierarchical structures, it is necessary for me to ground my analysis within a larger political economy of queer organizing. I use political economy to describe on-the-ground economic realities that are influenced by larger political ideologies. Specifically, in this paper, political economy refers both to the unequal distribution of funds to various LGBTQ organizations and to the production and reproduction of class privilege. I demonstrate in this paper how SALGA provides a comfortable, and, at times, radically transformative space for people who exist within socially acceptable ideas of queerness (i.e., cisgender[5] gay men), while others who are on the margins, working-class and trans* individuals, may not find the same resources through SALGA. SALGA provides a space for dissonance, critique, and an interrogation of class privileges, but this oppositional dimension is compromised by the very political-economic structures the organization wishes to challenge.

SALGA provides a lens for understanding South Asian queer diasporic organizing as well as community-based LGBTQ organizing on a broader scale. SALGA is a not-for-profit, all-volunteer organization that serves as a social, political, and support group for LGBTQ people of South Asian descent in New York City.[6] During the organization's twenty-five year tenure, SALGA has grown from a dozen South Asian gay men meeting informally[7] to reaching over one thousand individuals on its e-mail list-serv. SALGA is the only South Asian-specific queer organization in New York City and has established rapport among other LGBTQ organizations there. SALGA banners, T-shirts, and other promotional materials

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[5] Defined (along with other identity terms) in a short glossary at the conclusion of this paper.
[6] "SALGA-NYC," accessed 1 Aug. 2012, http://salganyc.org.
[7] Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 160.

include the tagline: Serving the Desi[8] Queer Community. According to its official mission statement, the organization's goals include enabling community members to establish cultural visibility and oppose oppression and discrimination in all its forms by encouraging leadership development, providing multi-generational support, promoting immigration advocacy, addressing health issues, and fostering political involvement.[9] According to one of my informants, Kamala,[10] who was political chair for the organization at the time of my fieldwork, the board members regularly revisit this mission statement to ensure their understanding of SALGA's initial founding and vision, often with hermeneutical precision, to make sure the board is working to meet the organization's goals.

Major decisions such as changes to the mission statement, collaboration for events, or financial decisions, are made by the volunteer SALGA board, made up of ten to twelve people. Although the term length varies for individuals, board members generally serve for a two-year term and are elected through SALGA town hall meetings, which are open to the public. Board positions include the logistic-focused such as treasurer, communications and social media chairs, as well the programming-focused such as political, youth outreach, and support group chairs. The board meets at the New York City LGBT Center on a monthly basis to discuss programming, new initiatives, and any other issues that may arise for the larger South Asian queer community. Because SALGA is not an officially registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization due to lack of a unified board, the organization's ideologies and sustainability efforts rely entirely upon individual board members. As a SALGA intern during my fieldwork, I spent a great deal of time with SALGA board members, who valued and worked to maintain a particular representation of South Asian queer organizing within the larger South Asian queer community.

My methodology for exploring the politics and representation of SALGA and the larger South Asian queer community in New York City was ethnography. In the summer of 2013, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for eleven weeks. My fieldwork included interviews with thirteen people either peripherally or centrally involved with the organization and participant observation at a number of SALGA events, including SALGA

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[8] "Desi" is a term generally used to refer to people of South Asian origin in the diaspora; however, this term does not have the same meaning for all individuals of South Asian descent. Due to colonial and partition histories, the term is contentious among certain areas of the diaspora. See Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 75-76.

[9] "Salga Nyc Facebook Page," accessed 20 Oct. 2012, http://www.facebook.com/salga

[10] Names of all interviewees have been changed for the sake of these individuals' confidentiality.

support group meetings, parties, board meetings, pride marches, and other SALGA co-sponsored events.[11] As an intern for SALGA, I was able to contribute some of my time to assisting the board members for events such as the Brooklyn and Queens community pride marches, film screenings, and various other social events, while utilizing the SALGA list-serv and social media pages to recruit participants to take part in my research. My interviews took place in coffee shops, restaurants, and personal offices, and ranged in length from twenty-five to ninety minutes. Along with my New York City fieldwork, my research also led me to DesiQ, a South Asian queer conference held in San Francisco, California in July 2013. The conference brought South Asian queer artists, activists, and scholars, along with people seeking community, together for a weekend for workshops, panels, and a closing banquet. DesiQ helped to inform my broad understanding of South Asian queer spaces and allowed me to continue to network with current and former SALGA members.

The use of ethnography as my primary methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of the lives of those involved with SALGA. Anthropologist Lyndon K. Gill's work on Black queer diasporas emphasizes the significance of ethnography in fully understanding queer diaspora: he writes, "Black queer studies remains incomplete without the appearance of Black queers not simply as representational abstracts but as situated, speaking subjects."[12] Using ethnographic methodologies, I explore the ways queer organizations such as SALGA influence individuals' experiences with identity as "situated, speaking subjects." Following the work of anthropologists like Gill, as well as Martin Manalansan and Naisargi Dave, I contextualize the real lives of queer diasporic subjects within institutions like NGOs, and processes like neoliberalism and globalization. Also significant in my choice of methodology is positionality, or my personal relationship to the research. I am comfortable with and open about my South Asian queer identity being easily granted access to SALGA spaces and DesiQ spaces. My complexion reveals my Punjabi background and my short hair and style of dress signal a non-normative gender presentation. As a result of this appearance, as well as my age, and educational and class background, my queerness was legible in all of the spaces I entered during my fieldwork. In conducting interviews, people spoke freely about coming out and queer identities, sensing that I probably empathized with the

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[11] I obtained IRB clearance in order to use these methodologies and informed consent from each of my interviewees. I will not discuss specific support group or board meetings in order to maintain the privacy of the individuals present and of the organization as a whole.

[12] Lyndon K. Gill, "Situating Black, Situating Queer: Black Queer Diasporic Studies and the Art of Embodied Listening," *Transforming Anthropology*, 20 (2012): 33.

stories they shared with me. My access to and position within South Asian queer spaces throughout my time conducting fieldwork are significant to note in discussing my primary data, as my experience was unique to a particular intersection of identities. Ultimately, I hope my use of ethnography illuminates the realities of queer diasporic spaces and the potential of these spaces to transform normative power structures.

Queer Diaspora

Queer diaspora refers to a theoretical lens that works at the intersections of queer theory and theories of diaspora and diasporic formations. It has been a useful concept in queer scholarship's recent turn to look more closely at race, ethnicity, and larger national and global political and cultural processes. The framework of queer diaspora bridges two bodies of literature: queer theory – referring not only to scholarship exploring non-normative sexual and gender identities but also to that which critiques larger heteronormative structures and ideas such as kinship and the family – and theories of diaspora – which explore communities that have migrated or have been displaced, and the dynamics that internally and externally affect these groups. Scholar Gayatri Gopinath, prominent in the study of a specifically South Asian queer diaspora, defines the idea of a queer diasporic framework: "The critical framework of a specifically queer diaspora, then, may begin to unsettle the ways in which the diaspora shores up the gender and sexual ideologies of dominant nationalism on the one hand, and processes of globalization on the other… This framework 'queers' the concept of diaspora by undercutting its dependence on genealogical, implicitly heteronormative logic."[13] According to Gopinath, a queer diasporic framework allows for a simultaneous critique of conventional nationalism, processes of globalization, heteronormativity. Her work specifies the ways in which Indian national ideologies uphold traditional notions of gender and sexuality, specifically in regards to ideas of femininity. Through a queer diaspora framework, Gopinath reveals the ways in which these processes rely on heteronormative logic, while simultaneously providing new critiques of globalization processes to existing queer theory literature.

While Gopinath's framework implies that queer diasporas can challenge and transform various dominant processes, its critics suggest that dominant ideologies might exist within queer diasporic settings. Jasbir Puar articulates this critique in "Transnational Sexualities: South Asian (Trans)nation(alism)s and Queer Diasporas," where she explores the implications and realities of a queer diaspora framework in a South Asian diasporic context. She says, queer diasporas "are not immune from [*sic*]

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[13] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 10.

forms of cultural nationalism; in fact, they may even *rely on them*."[14] Puar's critique of queer diaspora points out the ways the realities of queer diaspora may reiterate the same systems of oppression that scholars like Gopinath argue a queer diaspora should critique. Puar explains that this reiteration of systems is in part a result of the divisions within queer diasporic populations: "diasporic queers have… highly diverse histories of ethnicity, migration, class, generation, gender, and religious identity."[15] As Puar explains here, "diasporic queers" exhibit different backgrounds and experiences that give them differing relationships to such larger structures and processes as heteronormativity, racism, nationalism, and globalization. As a result, Puar argues, a physical or conceptual "queer diaspora" cannot inherently be oppositional, and must require the interrogation of these relationships to larger structures.

I draw attention to both Gopinath and Puar's takes on the use of a queer diasporic framework because each side engages different aspects of my fieldwork. Certain individuals, particularly upper-class, Indian, cisgender individuals' experiences highlighted the radical potential for an organization like SALGA to simultaneously critique heteronormativity, Indian nationalism, and white-centered notions of queerness. But others, particularly lower-income and trans* people, quite often felt excluded from these SALGA spaces. These exclusions were attributed to SALGA's funding structure, locating the organization within larger community of queer organizing, and the still larger political economy of non-profit philanthropy in the United States. Puar's critique of queer diaspora argues for recognizing the influences of larger political economic structures on the realities of individuals within queer diasporic spaces like SALGA. My ethnographic data suggests SALGA's radical potential is constrained by the unequal distribution of funds for various LGBTQ organizations.

The Radical Potential for Queer Diaspora, or, Utopian Visions for SALGA

I intentionally begin my discussion of SALGA with the organization's radical *potential*, rather than its limitations, in order to set the stage for my discussion of the everyday experiences with the organization. My understanding of "radical" comes from a number of queer of color critiques. Cathy Cohen's essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" addresses what a radical queer perspective and approach to both activism and scholarship can look like. Cohen's argument, central to my ultimate discussion and critique of SALGA's political potential, criticizes mainstream LGBT politics, specifically,

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[14] Jasbir Puar, "Transnational Sexualities: South Asian (Trans)nation(alism)s and Queer Diasporas," in *Q & A: Queer in Asian America, ed. David. L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom* (Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1997), 410. Emphasis original.
[15] Ibid.

the ways in which "queer" has lost the radical political meaning initially intended for the term: "For many of us, the label 'queer' symbolizes an acknowledgement that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multi-sited resistance to systems… that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility."[16] Particularly significant in her understanding of a radical queer politics is a class critique, which she makes clear in her comments on the exploitation of labor. Cohen pushes for a radical politics where LGBT-identified and lower class activists work in coalition with one another, thus critiquing and resisting a number of structures of oppression. In my consideration of SALGA, I deploy Cathy Cohen's critiques of queer politics. As a queer diasporic space, SALGA has the radical potential to challenge multiple sites of oppression and contribute to larger queer ideology of opposition.

I asked each of my informants to tell me about their "ideal SALGA," or ideal South Asian queer organization. Although not likely to materialize, these ideals reveal complex aspirations within the South Asian queer community in New York City, illustrating the oppositional potential for SALGA in representing a marginalized group. In much of his work on the performances of queer people of color, José Muñoz describes an idea of "queer utopia," which is relevant in understanding what SALGA's constituents and board members seek when they describe an "ideal SALGA." Muñoz argues, "Queerness is utopian and there is something queer about the utopian… Indeed to live inside straight time and to ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to present and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer."[17] This view espouses a particular value in anticipating a utopia that exists outside of "straight time." In the case of queer diaspora, "straight time" might refer to the heteronormative logic upon which ideas of diaspora are based. Problematizing this idea of "straight time" undermines the ideas of heterosexual genealogy upon which ideas of diaspora rest, or, as Gayatri Gopinath writes, the concept of diaspora's "dependence on genealogical, implicitly heteronormative logic."[18] The radical potential of queer diasporic spaces can also be described as a utopian vision for these spaces. My informants asked for, desired, and imagined South Asian queer spaces that met this radical potential, or represented a South Asian queer utopia.

While all of my informants' utopian ideals for SALGA were differ-

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[16] Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 21-51, 24.

[17] José E. Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies, ed. George Haggerty and Molly McGarry* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 457.

[18] Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 10.

ent, their answers to my question revealed a great deal about the challenges that SALGA faced. Kiran, a genderqueer-identified former board member of SALGA, said their[19] ideal South Asian queer organization would be "more engaged in broader political issues that affect queer people of color communities – or at least South Asian communities, and there's a lot going on right now, but there's not, like, consensus among the community." Kiran speaks here to an ideal SALGA that engages with local queer of color politics, and comments on the lack of "consensus" about these issues. Many of my informants, including Kamala and Jaya, two queer women on the SALGA board at the time of my fieldwork, spoke of political possibility in their descriptions of an ideal South Asian queer organization. Each of these board members sought South Asian queer organizing that was engaged with such issues as immigration and stop-and-frisk policies, which were particularly salient during my fieldwork. Other board members and constituents spoke about the need for more youth outreach and professionalization of SALGA board membership. While these critiques expressed what many of my informants viewed as limitations or weaknesses afflicting the organization, they also revealed a belief in SALGA's radical potential.

Central to SALGA's radical potential is the significance of a culturally specific queer space. SALGA is an organizational physical manifestation of the "conceptual space" of a queer diaspora.[20] Sociologist Monisha Das Gupta describes "space-making politics" in her work Unruly Immigrants, which explores the activist work of feminist, labor rights, and queer South Asian organizations (including SALGA) in the United States. Das Gupta emphasizes the significance of creating spaces for South Asian identities that are traditionally marginalized as abnormal (i.e., survivors of domestic violence, queer people, and working class people): "Questions of identity and community are thus part of the space makers' political agenda… The construction of South Asian identities and spaces because part of alternative cultural projects that enable us to center marginalized immigrants as key subjects whose narratives rewrite the immigrant story to expose the contradictory workings of the liberal state."[21] Das Gupta's

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[19] Kiran's chosen pronouns are they/them, generally consistent with genderqueer identity (see glossary).

[20] Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 27: "The framework of a queer South Asian diaspora produces conceptual space from which to level a powerful critique at the discourses of purity and 'tradition" that undergrid dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies; but it also works to reveal and challenge the presumed whiteness of queer theory and the compulsory heterosexuality of South Asian feminisms."

[21] Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 81.

avowal of "space-making politics" reveals the ways in which SALGA's spaces may carry a radical political potential. Focusing on marginalized queer subjects allows SALGA to expose and challenge normative narratives of migration and diaspora, defined by such assumptions as "straight time" and "heteronormative logic" that both José Muñoz and Gayatri Gopinath, respectively, critique in their work. According to Das Gupta, these acts of "space-making" are also able to expose larger state processes, particularly white queer politics and US and South Asian heterosexist nationalist politics. Das Gupta's idea of space-making as political suggests that looking at specific ethnographic examples of SALGA spaces can reveal the organization's radical political potential to challenge larger state-based and global processes.

Affirmed and Celebrated? Stories of the SALGA Support Group

When I asked my informants about the positive aspects of SALGA's work, almost all of them talked about the organization's monthly support group. Kamala said, "We have a support group that has ranging attendance but it is good for people who need it… I think providing those important spaces and connections where people are affirmed and celebrated for their queerness… and you don't have to, like, leave your South Asian-ness at the door. I think that's one of the ways SALGA contributes." The support group, as Kamala described, provides a space for individuals to tell their stories about their intersecting identities, find community, and feel affirmed in their identities. According to my various informants, the support group was also the most dependable component of SALGA's programming, which is particularly important to note in light of SALGA's limited funding and resources.

The support group seemed to be the most affordable activity for the organization, giving SALGA a consistent presence in New York's South Asian queer community. One of my informants, Kiran, a genderqueer-identified young person active in local queer Asian and South Asian communities, also made clear that the support group was SALGA's strongest component. Kiran said, "in terms of training facilitators for a real support group, there aren't like any other queer South Asian or queer Asian groups that do that, that I know of, like anywhere else in the country." Having such a training system in place demonstrates the organization's commitment to maintaining the support group, which is open only to queer-identified people of South Asian descent. For many, the support group represents SALGA's potential to do radical political work. Monisha Das Gupta writes, "…providing a safe community of South Asian queers, regardless of their political orientation, is itself a political act."[22] In keeping with her idea of the politics of creating spaces, Das Gupta argues that the creation of such

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[22] Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants*, 166.

safe community spaces as the support group carries political significance. While Das Gupta neglects a class analysis in her discussion of space-making, her perspective is important in understanding how stories from the support group, challenging white normative notions of "leaving the closet" and family acceptance, illustrate the ways the SALGA support group might be transformative.

Chanda, a twenty-five year old South Asian American queer woman, spoke highly of the support group meetings as a space where she did not need to explain her experiences with her identities. People in the support group seemed to understand her perspective because of what Chanda perceived to be a shared cultural background: "It was nice to go to SALGA, and go to a support group, and everything was understood right off the bat. There was no explaining, like, 'this is why I haven't told my mom,' it was kind of like, 'of course you haven't! You can't tell your mother!' So it was easier to be around that and not have to explain or have people be like, 'Oh my goodness, that's crazy!' It's not crazy to us." Chanda spoke to the psychological comfort that the SALGA support group meetings provided her. The fact that "everything was understood right off the bat" for Chanda not only reveals the significance of entering into a culturally friendly queer space, but also points to the ways SALGA resists normative narratives of (white) queerness. Chanda's decision not to disclose her sexuality to her family was "understood" within the support group, an implicit critique of the normative expectation of coming out of the closet. Queer of color theorist Marlon Ross describes the problem with queer theorists' emphases on the coming out process: "The 'coming out' or closet paradigm has been such a compelling way of fixing homosexual identification exactly because it enables this powerful narrative of progress… fundamentally as a doorway marking the threshold between up-to-date fashions of sexuality and all the outmoded, anachronistic others."[23] As Ross argues, emphases on the "closet paradigm" create a dichotomy between "modern" and "outmoded" sexualities, thus valorizing the concept of "coming out" as consistent with "up-to-date fashions of sexuality." According to this view, the "modernity" of "coming out" diminishes the experiences of queer people of color, for whom "the closet" is not the central focus for sexuality. Chanda offers a cultural and categorical alternative to "coming out" when she exclaims, "Of course you can't tell your mother!" Her experiences in support group meetings affirm that queer diasporic spaces hold the potential to challenge normative ideas of white queerness.

Chanda's positive experiences serve as contrast to those of Dhaval, a trans man who worked on SALGA's board as transgender outreach chair

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[23] Marlon Ross, "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

for two years. Dhaval describes the first time he attended a SALGA support group meeting, before he came out as transgender and after moving to the City to become a playwright: "I just felt like it was for people who were the wealthy Indians, not the poor artist Indians – like the folks who had really good jobs and could pay $20 to go to a party, and they all seemed to know each other and I didn't know anybody and I couldn't find a way in. And I was really butch, and I guess I didn't know anybody who was really butch at the time. So I think I was just like, 'whatever, I don't need these people,' and I left." This particular experience of attending a SALGA support group meeting and not finding a South Asian queer community as Chanda had underscores SALGA's difficulties in outreach. Entering a SALGA space for the first time as gender non-conforming and a "poor artist," Dhaval did not feel the SALGA support group space for someone like him. Dhaval's alienation indicates the obstacles to SALGA's realization of its radical potential. Individuals like Dhaval, who fall outside of a gender-normative understanding of queerness, may be ill-served by SALGA as it is currently structured.

Trans* Outreach & Burnout: Dhaval's Story

Despite his initial experience with SALGA spaces, Dhaval returned to SALGA meetings and joined the board, specifically with the purpose of making the organization more inclusive. Dhaval became the organization's first transgender outreach chair, working to increase trans awareness and inclusion in the organization. While Dhaval became a model volunteer for SALGA, he eventually became frustrated and burnt out with constantly having to be "the trans guy" for local South Asian queer organizing. Two of Dhaval's major trans-related projects were separate support group spaces for women and trans people and an online resource page with South Asian trans resources. Dhaval described the attendance at meetings and the launch party for the resource page:

> "I felt like all the folks who were South Asian and trans on the masculine spectrum had long ago left SALGA to do other, more radical things. And if they were trans on the feminine spectrum I didn't know where they were, either they weren't out of the closet yet or they came once or twice and didn't come back. And so… I really felt like, it doesn't matter if I create a webpage, or an event, if the community as a whole is not a supportive space, people aren't going to want to come into it. So I was really pushing for a training of the board, having a training for the community at large to be more sensitive to these issues. But it just like, I think I couldn't do it myself, and it just never happened. That was it, it never happened and eventually I burnt out."

Dhaval's frustrations with programming for the South Asian transgender population reveal a great deal about SALGA, the larger South Asian queer community in the City, and the complex politics of queer organizing. First, Dhaval observed that many of the trans-identified South Asian people in New York City did not use SALGA as their space to find community and "do more radical things." Generally, trans* members of the South Asian queer community did not feel the same radical and transformative influence within SALGA spaces that informants like Chanda did. Dhaval's experiences exemplify Jasbir Puar's critique of queer diaspora, where the variance within this diaspora creates the reinstatement of larger systems of social hierarchy hat queer diaspora aims to critique; in this case, transphobia in the larger community emerges within SALGA spaces.

Another important aspect of Dhaval's story was his experience of "burn out," growing tired of spearheading the trans-inclusivity efforts for the organization. He explained to me that working on projects on the SALGA board was primarily an individual endeavor; if Dhaval expressed interest in working with trans* issues, he was assigned that task: "I didn't know how to get people on the board to help me." He felt like he was doing much of the trans work alone, unsupported by other board members or by the larger South Asian queer community on these projects. Because Dhaval was the only trans-identified person on the board, which did not see trans outreach as a priority, he was unable to obtain help from others. Dhaval's eventual frustration with and break from SALGA organizing was a result of the organization's overall volunteer-run structure. Eric Tang describes the process of "burn out" in "Non-Profits and the Autonomous Grassroots." Burn out, he describes, refers, "not only to those who failed to pace themselves and in the end ran out of gas, but also to those who, during their days in various revolutionary parties and collectives, were burned by internal political processes and abuses of institutional authority… that resulted in many members wanting and needing alternative spaces to carry forth their work."[24] As Tang explains here, "burn out" can often be the result of internal processes that influence members' decision to seek alternative spaces to do work. For Dhaval, the lack of interest in trans issues within SALGA and the local South Asian queer community led to his fatigue in working on these issues. The "internal political processes and abuses of institutional authority" manifest as factionalism and narrowly defined self-interest, which are results of larger political and economic processes. Dhaval's story of being "burnt out" on the SALGA board points to the need to discuss the larger global and national processes affecting SALGA organizing.

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[24] Eric Tang, "Non-Profits and the Autonomous Grassroots," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 220.

Why Political Economy? Exclusions, Limitations & Financial Capabilities

      I use the term "political economy," as it is employed in the field of anthropology, in order to centralize economic processes on a global level and class at the local level in my analysis of SALGA. According to Soviet scholar A. Leontiev, political economy is a "class science," and a "sharp weapon in the struggle against capitalism."[25] The Marxist influence on the study of political economy is significant. By analyzing SALGA within such a "class science," I hope to reveal the intricacies and contradictions within capitalist systems and structures such as neoliberalism. I wish to use the context of political economy to analyze the political impact of the overall distribution of funds for LGBTQ organizations in the United States. Anthropologist Paul Friedrich defines political economy in his work, "Language, Ideology, and Political Economy," saying, "Political economy involves resource allocation in the sense, for example, of control over goods. Political economy involves the generic economic processes of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods, including 'non-material' ones, and the patterns of culture and power that control or influence these processes."[26] The power that influences the allocation of resources is particularly significant in understanding political economy, Friedrich writes. The sources of funds for queer organizing are part of larger networks of power relations and affects how radical queer organizing can hope to be.

      While quantifiable data about the distribution of funds to LGBTQ groups is limited, existing statistics reveal that Foundation funding going to such organizations tends not to reach those serving queer communities of color. Noelle Ito, Senior Director of Community Philanthropy for Asian American/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP), explains, "In 2011, foundations gave $123 million (.26% of all foundation funding) to LGBTQ organizations and projects. Of that, $14.4 million (11.7%) was to POC [People of Color] LGBTQ causes, and $1.8 million (1.5%) to AAPI LGBTQ causes."[27] From $1.8 million of foundation funding distributed amongst a host of AAPI LGBTQ organizations, SALGA attempts to meet its goals of "serving the desi queer community."

      At the time of my fieldwork, SALGA was receiving funding from a grant from the Stonewall Community Foundation, a donor-funded organization that aims to encourage community members to donate to grassroots

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[25] A. Leontiev, *Political Economy: A Beginner's Course* (San Francisco, Proletarian Publishers, 1975), 31.

[26] Paul Friedrich, "Language, Ideology, Political Economy," American Anthropologist 91 (1989), 298.

[27] From doqumentation.tumblr.com, quoting Noelle Ito at an AAPIP advocacy training workshop called, "Raising Money from Foundations and Community Fundraising."

LGBTQ organizations in New York City, and provides grants to these organizations. The Stonewall Foundation grant funding SALGA received was in its third and final year when I conducted my fieldwork in the summer of 2013, and Kamala expressed that she was "a little bit nervous" about what was to come next for the organization's funding. Grant money is generally supplemented by money gathered from fundraising, which is generally done through donations collected at parties and other social events. The funding of the organization through a foundation that relies entirely upon the donations of community members falls into a larger phenomenon of donor-funded NGOs, which are increasing in number and social responsibility.

Although SALGA is a volunteer-run community-based organization and not an officially recognized non-profit or non-governmental organization, the vast literature about NGOs within the broader context of globalization and neoliberalism suggests the existence of a larger political economy of grassroots organizing into which organizations like SALGA might fit. Much of this literature focuses on the global spread of NGOs. In her article "Capitalism: A Ghost Story," activist Arundhati Roy explains, "Of the millions of NGOs, some do remarkable, radical work and it would be a travesty to tar all NGOs with the same brush. However, the corporate or Foundation-endowed NGOs are global finance's ways of buying into resistance movements, literally like shareholders buy shares into companies, and then try to control them from within."[28] Although Roy is speaking broadly to NGOs with various aims, she also describes here the ways Foundations like the Stonewall Community Foundation allow global finance to "buy into" movements, such as LGBTQ movements. Thus, the proliferation of NGOs and their growing appeal to corporate capital is especially pertinent to my research. These larger processes were revealed through the stories of many of my informants; like Dhaval, many of my informants expressed feeling burnt out working with SALGA or frustrations with the limitations of SALGA's lack of funding.

Because SALGA does rely entirely on its volunteer board members and limited funding, the board members struggled to meet the needs of the community. Ananth, who departed from the board in September 2012, nearly a year before my fieldwork, discussed his difficulties with the volunteer-run basis of the organization, and then began to explain how this can then lead to fatigue of the board members. Ananth explained:

> "I think while you're on the board there's always this sense of, 'Oh my god, we're not doing enough, we're not doing enough, we're not doing enough!' Even though… other people were always like, 'dude, SALGA's doing more than many other organizations are.'

[28] Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

> But I think it's very hard because we have such a huge community in New York, and the community is so visible, we see them visible at, like, social events, like the Sholay parties and so-on, and we want to… harness that in some way, for something! But we're not sure a) how to harness it and b) what we're harnessing it for."

Ananth described a lack of strategy to "harness" the energy of the larger South Asian queer population in New York City. Specifically, he stressed the constant feeling of "not doing enough," which exhausts board members and makes SALGA's overall impact on the community unclear. As is clear from Ananth's experience, these feelings of burnout come from the organization's volunteer structure, and lack of centralization and direct financial support for the board members and the organization as a whole. Ananth's frustration with how to harness the energy of the community, and where to direct this energy, comes from the intersection of these organizational and financial incapacities and limitations.

Srinivas, a former SALGA board member, also expressed difficulty working within a volunteer organization. Srinivas and I spoke by phone about his experiences working with the creation of youth-specific spaces with SALGA, and his overall experiences working on the board. Srinivas pointed specifically to the limitations he felt were due to the organization's volunteer basis. He explained, "Volunteer organizations never really go anywhere, we were told." He spoke highly of one particular month during his tenure on the SALGA board when the organization put on weekly events, including receptions, pride poster-decorating parties, and town hall events. This particular month was noteworthy because, in general, it was difficult to secure attendance "when you're competing – well, not competing – with these other organizations." By this, Shrinivas meant to describe the way SALGA is situated amongst organizations with similar missions, including queer Asian/Pacific Islander and queer people of color organizations. While Shrinivas essentially decided in this aside that these organizations are not competing with one another, likely because these organizations often do collaborate with one another, his point carries some truth. The reality of this competition is clear when considering the larger political economy within which SALGA fits. Anthropologist Naisargi Dave describes competition among NGOs serving queer populations in her ethnographic work on queer activism in India. Dave explains, "In a globalized world of activism as a competitive marketplace, abstract development agendas and interpersonal rivalries are the forces of politics – this is a descriptive claim, not a cynical position."[29] Development agendas and interpersonal rivalries set the stage for "competition," as there are limited

[29] Naisargi Dave, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 75.

resources to be distributed amongst queer organizations with similar visions and goals. Shrinivas alludes to this competition in his experiences of frustration in working to increase visibility and event attendance with SALGA. Existing among a number of other volunteer-based organizations in New York City, SALGA falls within this "marketplace" competing nationally and internationally for grant funding and donations to continue its efforts.

"There's a lot of dudes:" SALGA Parties

Because SALGA uses parties as a necessary fundraising tool, SALGA parties are an important structural events when considering the radical potential of South Asian queer spaces, particularly within the larger issue of funding politics for the organization. SALGA is most well known throughout South Asian queer communities and New York City queer communities for its parties; onlookers at various pride parades and informational events commented on attending "Gender Bending Bollywood Style," "Color Me Queer," "Fifty Shades of Queer," and other South Asian or people of color-specific queer parties. Along with this renown, the parties that SALGA co-sponsors or holds provide a relatively consistent stream of funding because of a requested admission fee of $5-$20. Because these parties help the organization to sustain itself, the board quite often needs to prioritize them over other types of events, even though the demographics at these parties are not very diverse. Across the board, my interviewees said that cisgender gay men dominate SALGA parties. When asked about her experiences with the parties, Kamala explained, "I haven't really gone to very many… There's a lot of dudes… I think they're fun. I wish that more women would come. I wish that they were accessible to a wider range of people, and drew from a wider range of people, who are not just gay cis men, but like, trans folks, women, and socioeconomically more diverse groups." Kamala expressed a significant aspect of SALGA parties, specifically, the events' inability to produce broader and more meaningful socializing among various queer constituencies.

While SALGA parties draw particularly homogenous crowd, Ananth's experience of dressing in drag at a SALGA "gender bending" party demonstrates the ways SALGA spaces can provide radical representations of South Asian queerness. Ananth and I met a few times at SALGA events, where Ananth either wore a sari or spoke openly about his experiences wearing saris. At Manhattan Pride in June 2013, in front of a crowd that was nearly two million people, Ananth wore both a sari and a wig. When I asked him about his experiences dressing in a sari, he felt comfortable answering my questions honestly and self-critically: "The way it happened first was really organic. SALGA threw a gender-bending party and I think, like, my first instinct was like, 'Oh, I'm going to wear a sari!' And then I realized – I spent so much time thinking about it… and I put so

much into it." Through a gender-bending party, Ananth was provided the physical space to explore what it would mean for him to wear a sari. He was also able to further explore what this meant through a writing workshop that SALGA organized in conjunction with Q-WAVE and GAPIMNY[30], where he wrote a play about a character who describes wanting to be, "just a boy in a sari."

Being able to perform an identity of "just a boy in a sari" offers a potential for radical culturally specific queerness. Ananth's description of dressing as "just a boy in a sari" uses a culturally specific image, the sari, to put on a performance that actively resists not only white normativity and heteronormativity, but also larger political and economic structures that support such forms of normativity. José E. Muñoz describes the performance of queer people of color, specifically Latino/a queer people, in "counterpublics," or spaces that publicly counteract hegemonic structures of power. Muñoz describes "practices of queer and Latino counterpublicity – acts that publicize and theatricalize an ethics of self," as performances that often "insist on local specificities and history" in order to "defy the white normativity and heteronormativity of the majoritarian public sphere."[31] Muñoz points out the significance of resisting histories that have often relied heavily on capitalist structures of the state. By identifying as a boy while wearing a sari, Ananth defies cultural expectations for traditionally feminine Indian dress. He performs this identity publicly in a way that creates a radical, visible image of South Asian queerness. In doing so, Ananth resists white normativity in queer communities and heteronormativity in traditional Indian dress. Ananth's experience, facilitated by a SALGA gender-bending party space, reveals a form of the organization's radical potential to challenge larger normative structures.

"I just encapsulated all my privilege into one sentence:" Interrogating Privileges

While Ananth's idea of "just a boy in a sari" presents the radical potential for queer performance in a culturally specific space, his identity as a cisgender gay man also makes this identification possible. Looking at Ananth's interrogation of his own privilege in this instance, the ways in which people from privileged backgrounds may be able to interrogate their own privileged positions through SALGA spaces becomes clear. In our conversation, Ananth described an experience of his trans*-identified friend, who critiqued SALGA's gender bending parties, claiming that they

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[30] Q-WAVE: Queer Women (and trans*) Asian, Visible and Empowered; GAPIMNY: Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men of New York. These two organizations were ones with which SALGA very frequently collaborated.

[31] José E. Muñoz, *Disidentifications* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 147-148.

were fun, but that, as a trans-person, he could not, "simply wake up in the morning and decide, 'Okay, I'm done with gender bending!'" His friend's trans* identity is erased by the celebration of gender bending as a temporary, party-specific activity. Ananth is very aware of his own privileges as a cisgender male, especially as he explains his process for writing his play:

"Actually, that's the most escapist line in my whole play. Cause you know, it doesn't really deal with anything. Like, I just encapsulated all my privilege in one sentence and threw it out there. Because, you know, I'm a boy and have all these choices and of course I can act like… because you know, I have money, I can pay my rent, I can buy saris, I can wear makeup, I have friends at whose places I can go to wear my saris. I have friends who will come with me on the train and, like, catch cabs with me. And I have SALGA where I can – I can be safe in this space. That is all what it takes to produce, 'just a boy in a sari.'"

Ananth describes the intersections of many aspects of his identity, including class and gender identity, which all come together to form his radical queer identity as "just a boy in a sari." SALGA provides him a safe space to explore his performance of queerness, but he still identifies as a cisgender male who has a great deal of privilege, as evidenced in what he describes as "all these choices." Ananth's awareness of his own privilege illustrates the ways SALGA provides a space for individuals to confront and examine their own privileges.

Like Ananth, most of my informants, particularly those who worked on the board of the organization, acknowledged the privileges that they held within the larger South Asian queer community. The board members' recognition of privilege demonstrates that SALGA provides opportunities for internal critique and dissonance. Toward the end of our conversation, Kamala spoke about her understanding of privilege within SALGA. She explained, "many of us bring a lot of privilege and are really privileged in society and in the US, and a lot of the people who participate and work on SALGA things have families that might not be very accepting, but have managed to carve out spaces for themselves and are not, like, struggling to find homes." Kamala's mention of various SALGA constituents not having difficulty "finding homes" reveals a significant elision of class politics and dialogue among SALGA members. Although individuals may have had particularly difficult experiences with coming out or accepting their sexuality, people involved with SALGA seem to be middle- or upper-class. SALGA members may be able to present radical challenges to white queer normativity and to homophobia, but they are unable to perform a radical class critique in the same way. At the same time, Ananth and Kamala's recognition of these privileges demonstrate a space for dissonance and internal critique that the organization provides, suggesting that

SALGA may be more mature politically and more inherently oppositional than it might appear on the surface.

The stories of my informants, alongside my own participant observations, reveal the realities of entering South Asian queer spaces. My informants spoke highly of being able to enter these spaces where they were able to bring their whole selves. In these spaces, the affirmation of such intersectional identities represents a kind of space-making politics. Within the support group and party spaces in particular, SALGA constituents were able to find the space not only to explore and feel affirmed in their marginalized identities, but also to critique and interrogate their own understandings of privilege. At the same time, these instances of radical political potential of the organization were only realities for particular types of South Asian queer people; working-class and trans*-identified people were often left out of larger SALGA organizing and dialogue. The inclusions, exclusions, and interrogations that exist within these SALGA spaces demonstrate the radical potential for queer diasporic spaces, and, sadly, the ultimate influence of political economic processes that limit the full reach of SALGA as a community-based organization.

Glossary of LGBTQ/Queer Terms

Cisgender: Gender identity term describing normative gender, where one's gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth. Cisgender is sometimes abbreviated as "cis."

Genderqueer: Gender identity term that exists outside of "man" or "woman," generally meaning to challenge this gender binary. Often included under the "trans*" umbrella. Genderqueer-identified individuals often use gender-neutral pronouns, such as they/them, ze/hir, or ze/zir.

Queer: In this paper, I use "queer" to refer to all identities that fall outside of a hetero- or gender normative context, included but not limited to such identity terms as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, genderqueer, intersex, and asexual.

Trans:* Trans* is often used in LGBTQ activist and organizational circles as an umbrella term for all people who fall outside of a normative gender identity, including but not limited to individuals who identify as transgender, transsexual, cross-dresser, or genderqueer.

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Outsiders to the System: Exploring the Obstacles and Tensions Faced by Low-Income Refugee Populations Seeking Medical Care

By DAVIDA FARHAT

Abstract: For refugees to the United States, the establishment of legal recognition is a process that takes at least a year on average. This population frequently must support and sustain themselves in the face of a lack of material and social resources, government-imposed work restrictions and time-limited benefits. In this paper, I analyze the experiences of low-income refugees as they seek health insurance and access to healthcare. I focus on three intersecting categories of obstacles to acquiring care: language and self-presentation, financial barriers, and structural barriers, including temporal constraints. I explore the ways that individuals are approaching and overcoming these barriers. From February to October 2013, I worked as an intern at Mosaic, an organization focused on asylum-seeker and refugee assistance a Midwestern metropolitan area I am calling Easton. While I worked with the organization, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with clients and staff, supplemented with participant observation and informal conversations. Based on my observations, I argue that the policies and practices of the organization do not fully take into account the individual and structural obstacles that intersect to create difficulties for their clients to access health insurance and healthcare.

Introduction

Hannah[1] is a Liberian woman in her forties who arrived to the United States approximately five years ago. A survivor of Liberia's second civil war (1999-2003), Hannah is one of over three million refugees who have been resettled by the United States since 1975.[2] The term "refugees" refers to

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[1] Throughout this paper, I will be using pseudonyms to refer to the individuals with whom I interacted, in order to protect their privacy.
[2] "Office of Refugee Resettlement," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr.

individuals who have left their home country because of persecution or threat of persecution, and have been granted asylum before arriving to the United States.[3] About a week before I first met her in July of 2013, Hannah passed her citizenship test and was excited to attend her naturalization ceremony. However, before becoming a naturalized citizen, Hannah faced obstacles, both individual and structural, to navigating a new social and political system. Her story illuminates the difficulties of many seeking protection in the United States.

Before and after arriving to the United States, refugees must undergo security clearances and medical examinations.[4] They must be adjudicated and granted legal recognition by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, a component of the Department of Homeland Security. Lack of legal recognition prohibits them from obtaining documentation, such as identification cards or driver's licenses, acquiring part- or full-time employment or accessing social services. Transitioning from residents in waiting to legally recognized residents begins upon arrival in the US and takes on average over a year.[5] During this liminal period, refugees frequently must support themselves facing a lack of material and social resources, government-imposed work restrictions and temporary benefits. One such benefit is the health care coverage offered through the Refugee Medical Assistance Program (RMA). RMA is available for refugees for eight months after they arrive in the United States. The insurance provided through the program functions as Medicaid does in the state of residence.[6] Many refugees, including Hannah, by the end of the eight-month period, have not obtained another source of health insurance. If the year to acquire legal recognition and the eight months of RMA run concurrently, there exists a period of at least four months during which refugee populations are not covered by health insurance. During this time, there is no way that an individual can acquire health coverage, as legal recognition is required for employment, which may provide health insurance, and legal resident status is required to apply for Medicaid.

On a day that I am shadowing Hannah's case manager, Abdi, we visit Hannah's home so that she can sign paperwork as a new client of Mosaic.[7] Mosaic's literature describes its mission as assisting immigrant populations who are survivors of torture and war trauma. While she has been in the United States, Hannah has not been able to find full-time work, even after her adjudication. Abdi is Hannah's case manager and has been assist-

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[3] "Refugees," UNCHR, 2014, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html.

[4] "Office of Refugee Resettlement," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Access to Care," *Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center*, 2011, http://refugeehealthta.org/access-to-care/.

[7] I have changed the name of the organization.

ing Hannah in her job search for a month. When Abdi explains to Hannah that I am interested in speaking with her for a research project, Hannah seems apprehensive. She wonders aloud why I would want to talk to her, as she is not well educated. Further, she asks if I will be collecting any of her personal information and sharing it without her knowledge. I assure her that I am solely interested in hearing the stories of refugees in the area, which does not require identifying them. Hannah then consents to an interview.

As we talk, I see certificates for her children hanging on the walls of her living room – a few for perfect attendance and one for reading skill. Hannah is not married to the father of her children – she explained that it was too expensive for her to have a wedding in Liberia. Hannah has two biological children, and she began raising her sister's two children after their mother died during the conflict. When she talks to me about the children, Hannah refers to them all as her own. She and the children emigrated from Liberia, and her children's father stayed behind. Those who are granted refugee status may have their status extended to their spouses and children; however, because Hannah is not married to her children's father, he could not benefit from her status.[8]

According to Hannah, she has made money to support her family through housekeeping. She tells me that she tries to provide good care, despite not having steady work. Hannah explains that the oldest child has a leg injury, but she is thankful that he has health insurance, allowing him medical treatment. Although all of her children have health insurance, provided through the state healthcare program for children of low-income families, Hannah does not. "I had it [at] one time, because you know, I came because of the war. But now it's finished, and I can't go [to the] doctor." Hannah's RMA began when she arrived in the United States, but during the eight months she was eligible for assistance, she had to wait for legal recognition and for a doctor's appointment. As a result, Hannah has seen a doctor only one time since her arrival.

In addition to the constraints created by the time limit of Refugee Medical Assistance, Hannah faces other difficulties that impede her access to health insurance and medical care. Hannah explains to me that she has been trying to apply for Medicaid since becoming a permanent resident, but that she faces difficulties, such as finding transportation. In her efforts to attain Medicaid and other services through the Department of Family Services, Hannah has learned to alter her self-presentation in various important ways: "I have to make myself sound more 'American' for them to take me serious[ly]," she says of social service employees. For Hannah, sounding more American means speaking slowly and deliberately and at-

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[8] "Office of Refugee Resettlement," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr.

tempting to hide her Liberian accent. In Hannah's experience, her accent marks her as an outsider, which she feels causes social service workers to treat her dismissively. Before I told her that my parents are from Liberia, Hannah spoke in the slow and careful manner that marked her attempts to hide her accent. She became more comfortable only when I began asking her questions in Liberian English. As the group of Liberian residents in the metropolitan area of Easton is small, and the group of Liberian health care providers is even smaller, it is unlikely that Hannah feels comfortable enough to avoid modifying her accent in healthcare settings.

Hannah's story speaks to the complex barriers faced by many refugees when navigating the medical system in the United States. There are communication barriers: Hannah feels that she must change the way that she speaks in order to avoid being recognized as a foreigner by service providers and opening herself up to inferior treatment. She understands English, but the dialect that she speaks is different from the spoken English of the majority of providers in the healthcare system, and it marks her as an outsider. Some refugees to the United States do not speak English at all; the communication barriers they face are even more formidable than Hannah's. These individuals must rely on family members, friends or professional translators to communicate for them. Yet, language barriers are not the source of all the difficulties faced by refugees who attempt to access health services. There are other obstacles experienced by English-speaking and non-English-speaking refugees alike.

In addition to guarding against censure as a foreigner seeking social services, Hannah has no health insurance. This creates substantial obstacles for her, as she is also unemployed with little money to pay for doctor's visits, medications, and other health expenses. When I ask her about the possibility of acquiring insurance, Hannah tells me that health insurance is too expensive. She mentions that she hopes to go again to the Department of Family Services in order to apply for Medicaid, but she says, "They will cut my insurance when I start working." Hannah is referring to the fact that if she is working and her income rises above the cutoff for Medicaid, she is no longer eligible. However, even though her income could be above what would qualify her for Medicaid, she would not necessarily be capable of affording medical insurance.

Securing health insurance and health care can be difficult for refugees; for as Hannah's story shows, communication barriers, the perception of refugees as "others," financial constraints, and temporal and structural restrictions on access can combine to make health insurance and healthcare virtually unattainable. Further, if refugee assistance organizations like Mosaic do not recognize these impediments, they can unwittingly intensify their effect. Throughout this paper, I use Hannah's story, and similar stories, to reveal the barriers to healthcare that exist and the ways in which assistance efforts can inadvertently reinforce these barriers.

Literature Review

        Much of the literature concerning migrant populations and their interaction with the healthcare system describes obstacles that impede healthcare acquisition for individuals who have already attained health insurance or secured care appointments. For example, Hernandez and Kimbro explain that the inability of patients to understand the language used by healthcare providers can contribute substantially to experiences that may cause them to avoid the system entirely.[9] Other studies emphasize the influence of social support from others in the same ethnic group has on encouraging immigrants' acquisition of health services.[10] These two groups of studies explain barriers to healthcare as obstacles that can be overcome by behavior change on the part of the individual, rather than acknowledging any part the social service system may play in creating or reinforcing these barriers. My observations a Mosaic suggests that the policies and practices of social institutions can, however inadvertently, make accessing health insurance and health care more difficult for refugees.

        The consequences of refugees' inability to access healthcare include chronic disease complications due to lack of treatment and development or worsening of a variety of disease conditions due to lack of preventative care.[11] However, few studies focus on the factors that foster uninsurance, such as the difficulties that refugee individuals face during the interim period of acquiring Refugee Medical Assistance and becoming legally recognized, or the difficulties accessing the medical system once RMA has expired. It is feasible, though to imagine these difficulties as influencing and being influenced by what Steel et al. describe as "a pattern of growing mental distress, ongoing resettlement difficulties, social isolation, and difficulty in the acculturation process amongst refugees subject to restrictive

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[9] Daphne C. Hernandez, and Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, "The Association between Acculturation and Health Insurance Coverage for Immigrant Children from Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Regions of Origin," *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health* 15, (2012): 454.

[10] Edna A. Viruell-Fuentes and Amy J. Schulz "Toward a Dynamic Conceptualization of Social Ties and Context: Implications for Understanding Immigrant and Latino Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 12 (2009): 2169; Jennifer Simmelink, Elizabeth Lightfoot, Amano Dube, Jennifer Blevins and Terry Lum, "Understanding the Health Beliefs and Practices of East African Refugees," *American Journal of Health Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2013): 160.

[11] Katherine Yun, Kelly Hebrank, Lauren Graber, Mary-Christine Sullivan, Isabel Chen and Jhumka Gupta, "High Prevalence of Chronic Non-Communicable Conditions among Adult Refugees: Implications for Practice and Policy," *Journal of Community Health* 37, no. 5 (2012): 1111.

immigration policies."[12] Restrictive immigration policies include the possibility of deportation among refugees who have not yet received legal documentation and recognition.[13] Refugees to the United States face legislation that prohibits their access to health coverage, and even when they are granted coverage, these individuals must navigate a medical system that is difficult to understand and can be hostile to non-citizens. The protocols of service providers, such as Mosaic, can further impede refugees' acquisition of health insurance and healthcare if these compounded difficulties are not fully taken into consideration.

Methods

The primary data for this paper comes from my observations working in the office of Mosaic and shadowing staff members on client visits over a nine-month period, February to November 2013. I mostly performed clerical work, with a focus on patient files. Staff members are required to document each instance of client contact, so my clerical duties included filing client contact forms, creating new files for clients and copying client information forms for outside parties, such as a client's psychiatrist. Access to client files gave me the opportunity to learn what information must be collected and stored by the agency. Further, I learned from client information the backgrounds and identities of those seeking services from the agency.

When shadowing case managers, I was able to meet clients at their homes and places of employment, as well as be present at doctor visits and other appointments. I was able to note the ways that clients interacted with their case managers and with others, like healthcare providers. Through these interactions, I met more than thirty clients of Mosaic, many of whom were willing to speak directly with me about their experiences in the United States. Beyond observation and informal conversation, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four clients of the organization and two employees. While interacting with clients and staff as a Mosaic intern, I asked individuals if they would be interested in participating in my research. Each individual who was interviewed gave verbal consent. Potential client participants were informed that participation is voluntary and that continued services from Mosaic were not dependent on participa-

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[12] Zachary Steel, Shakeh Momartin, Derrick Silove, Marianio Coello, Jorge Aroche and Kuo Wei Tay, "Two Year Psychosocial and Mental Health Outcomes for Refugees Subjected to Restrictive or Supportive Immigration Policies," *Social Science & Medicine* 72, (2011): 1149.

[13] Karen Hacker, Jocelyn Chu, Carolyn Leung, Robert Marra, Alex Pirie, Mohamed Brahimi, Margaret English, Joshua Beckmann, Dolores Acevedo-Garcia and Robert P. Marlin, "The Impact of Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Immigrant Health: Perceptions of Immigrants in Everett, Massachusetts, USA," *Social Science & Medicine* 73, (2011): 591.

tion in the project. During interviews, I took notes, including information about setting and non-verbal communication.[14]

Demographics of the participants in my research reflected the client makeup of the agency. During 2012, Mosaic served over 300 clients from 33 countries. Mosaic's clients are considered either asylum-seekers, those who apply for the protection of the United States government after arriving in the country, or refugees. For this project, I focus on the refugee clients of Mosaic. The agency's clients are majority Bosnian, followed by Middle Eastern and West African (specifically Cameroonian, Liberian and Sierra Leonean). Other areas represented among the clientele include the Democratic Republic of Congo and East African nations, particularly Somalia. The ages of Mosaic clients range from teenagers to elderly adults, particularly because all individuals in one family unit may receive services from the organization. The four clients I interviewed were women. I chose to focus on women because the majority of client-agency interactions that I observed involved female clients. Further, women are more likely than men to interact with the healthcare system.[15] All employees of Mosaic who are immigrants speak at least one language other than English fluently. These case managers can act as interpreters for clients with whom they share a language. However, many clients of the organization speak languages or dialects that the case managers do not speak. In such instances, Mosaic obtains interpreting services through other agencies. As interpreting services are not widely available in Easton, acquiring interpreters to facilitate interviews with non-English-speaking participants was not possible. Further, some of Mosaic's clients, particularly those from West African nations, speak dialects for which interpreting agencies do not provide services. Although I could not speak directly with non-English-speaking clients, I was able to observe the experiences of many clients of the agency who spoke other languages. However, I was limited in my choice of interview participants because I could only interview English-speaking individuals.

Agency Narratives

Mosaic describes its focus as the mental health and wellbeing of their clients, as all of their clients have left their home countries because of conflict and trauma. The agency's literature refers to clients as "survivors of torture and war trauma," making no distinction between services provided to refugee clients and those provided to asylum-seeking clients.

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[14] I obtained IRB approval for my research methodology.
[15] Gabriela S. Betancourt, Lisa Colarossi and Amanda Perez, "Factors Associated with Sexual and Reproductive Health Care by Mexican Immigrant Women in New York City: A Mixed Method Study," *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health*, 15 (2013): 326-333.

An immigration lawyer is on staff to provide assistance to individuals who are seeking citizenship. Before 2012, Mosaic offered free legal services to clients, but these services now have fees due to decreased funding and governmental budget cuts. In addition to providing legal and mental health services, Mosaic assists their clients with accessing social services and acquiring employment and housing.

After the first month of services, Mosaic requires that case managers review expectations and goals with clients, allowing time for clients to decide if they are satisfied with and would like to continue receiving services from the organization. If clients decide to continue, case managers then put together a document called a treatment plan – a course of action that outlines client goals, means of achieving said goals and ways Mosaic can assist clients in reaching these goals. Case managers draw up treatment plans for all clients – those like Hannah, who are primarily searching for employment; those who are looking for assistance in dealing with substance abuse; and those who are seeking assistance accessing government programs, such as Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Treatment plan forms contain a list of potential services, and for each service, case managers ask clients if they would like assistance in the particular area. Clients, then, establish their goals by a yes-or-no procedure, rather than case managers gauging the client's situation and making suggestions. Although this protocol allows for clients to guide their own "treatment," if clients do not understand the full advantage of available services, as may be the case for newcomers to the United States, they may miss the opportunity to acquire necessary assistance.

Although case managers seek to connect their clients to beneficial social services, the agency's policies can inadvertently perpetuate barriers to refugees' access to these services. When a goal of a client is to acquire employment, obtaining part-time employment is considered a success by the agency. In the case of clients who seek both employment and health insurance, Mosaic employees help them acquire employment and facilitate applying for Medicaid. These clients are discharged when they have obtained employment and applied for Medicaid; their cases are considered instances of successful service provision. However, part-time employment and a submitted application for government-funded health coverage may not result in health insurance. If the goal of securing employment is met but a given client's income exceeds the cutoff for social services, Mosaic clients are then ineligible to receive these services, and their applications will be denied. However, denial of Medicaid coverage does not mean that the client's income is not enough to cover the cost of health insurance on the private market. Further, Easton is in a state that is not expanding Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act, so refugees in this situation will likely remain unable to afford a health insurance policy that addresses their needs.

In my interviews with agency staff, they did not offer accounts of the structural and temporal complexity their clients faced, but rather straightforward accounts of client choice, preference and pursuit of self-interest. The degree to which employees' accounts of client behavior and choices do not take into account the intersecting barriers to health insurance and healthcare access their clients face suggests there may be ways in which client needs are not being met by the agency, despite their sincere and consistent efforts. When I ask Timothy, the director of the agency, for reasons that some clients are uninsured, he replies, "Some of our clients are used to having universal healthcare and don't like the idea of paying, so they can do without." However, the majority of Mosaic's clients come from Bosnia, countries in West Africa and Afghanistan: none of which have universal healthcare.[16] Timothy's belief that clients are accustomed to free medical care and are thus unwilling to pay for insurance cannot be the sole explanation for clients being uninsured, as many are from countries with fee-for-service medical care. In my conversations with clients, many stated that finances hinder their acquisition of health insurance. These individuals explained that they are not unwilling to pay, but they do not have the resources to afford insurance. What are the implications of staff members believing clients to be able, but unwilling, to pay for health insurance?

During a weekly staff meeting, Mosaic employees discuss a family of clients from the Middle East who has requested access to Medicaid. When he learns of this request, Timothy states, "They have the money to pay for it; they just don't want to." Staff members then debate the family's eligibility, based on their yearly income. Timothy asks me to research the income cutoffs for Medicaid eligibility in the state and provide this information to Zahra, the family's case manager. Although the family was ineligible to apply for Medicaid, their income did not indicate that paying for monthly health insurance would be feasible. The policy of Mosaic to assist in applying for government-funded health coverage services can ignore whether clients are able to afford to pay for health insurance, even if their income is above the cutoff. Employees of the agency seek to meet the needs of their clients based on the services that they are able to provide, yet the provided services may not consider the complex network of opposition that clients face.

Accessing Alternative Means of Care

On alternative means to pay for medical care, Timothy tells me, "Some Bosnians who have been here a long time and don't have insurance, they go back to Bosnia to get dental work. [Doing this is] cheaper, even

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[16] Dan Munro, "Universal Coverage Is Not 'Single Payer' Healthcare," *Forbes*, December 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/danmunro/2013/12/08/universal-coverage-is-not-single-payer-healthcare/.

with the cost of travel." Although this option can prove to be much more affordable than the fee-for-service option in the United States, some clients, especially those who are unemployed, can afford neither option. Employees of Mosaic and others within the healthcare system may view the alternative means of attaining healthcare of refugees who are uninsured as "gaming the system." This sentiment is exemplified in the reaction of agency employees to the efforts of a former client, Ruth, to access services. Ruth is a middle-aged Liberian woman who has five children, four of whom live with her. She speaks little English, and Mosaic has been unable to find professional translators near Easton who speak her dialect. Through the help of her Mosaic case manager, Ruth was able to acquire a part-time job as a housekeeper in a hospital. Because Mosaic discharges clients after they reach the goals of their treatment plan or after nine months of services, whichever comes first, Ruth is no longer a client of the agency. However, when Ruth began having debilitating stomach pains, her employer contacted Mosaic to see if there was anything that the staff could do to connect Ruth to healthcare. As a part-time worker, Ruth is ineligible for employer-sponsored health insurance; however, her two children under the age of 18 are insured through the state healthcare program for children of low-income families. The family has been in the United States over eight months, so their healthcare is no longer covered by Refugee Medical Assistance. Her two older children who live with her, therefore, are also uninsured.

When I meet Ruth for the first time, a case manager named Tarik and I sit down with her at her place of employment. Some of the staff members had explained to me that they had difficulty understanding Ruth's English, and Timothy hoped that I could better understand her needs. Ruth and I are able to speak with each other in Liberian English, but she discloses during the course of our conversation that she is more comfortable speaking in her dialect than in English. In spending time with Ruth, I learn that she commonly answers, "Yes," and "Okay," when speaking to people outside of her immediate family, even when asked or told something that she does not understand. Ruth tells me that she had been to see a doctor who told her that her stomach pains could be treated with surgery. She laments that she has no way to pay for such surgery, and when I ask her how she will pay for the doctor visit, she tells me that she does not know. Ruth also explains to me the difficulty of coordinating a doctor visit; she must schedule an appointment on the rare weekday that she does not work, and she must rely on public transportation to get to an appointment. She explains that although she takes public transportation to work, there is no direct route that she can take to her doctor's office, and she must transfer multiple times, taking hours to travel only a few miles.

Ruth's original case manager recently moved out of the state, so Timothy assigns me the task of following up with Ruth as one of my intern duties. At times when I see Ruth, a case manager from Mosaic is present

to determine if the agency can provide any further assistance. About two weeks after our first meeting, I accompany Zahra, another caseworker, to Ruth's home so that we can help her apply for Medicaid. When we arrive, Ruth explains that she is still experiencing stomach pain as she waits for her next doctor visit. Zahra and I explain to Ruth that we want to help her apply for health insurance, and in order to do this, we need to see her most recent paystubs. Ruth brings us the envelope in which she keeps them. Meanwhile, Ruth's oldest daughter, who does not live with her mother but visits often, remembers that Ruth has a card in her purse that is related to health insurance. She gives the card to Zahra, who asks Ruth how she got the card. Ruth explains that a case manager gave it to her, but not one from Mosaic. Calling the number on the card, we find out that Ruth is a client at a local organization that serves local HIV-positive individuals. Until this point, no one at Mosaic knew Ruth is a client at another organization, or that she is HIV-positive.

Although HIV status can be noted in client information forms, Zahra explains to me that potential clients are not required to disclose their status. She says that she believes Ruth may have been ashamed of her status and did not want it to affect her ability to receive services from Mosaic. When Zahra and I discuss the meeting with Timothy, he wonders aloud why Ruth would not disclose the aid she receives from the other agency. He tells us that he thinks that Ruth was working with both agencies in order to "see what she could get out of both of us." I did not obtain information about the length of time that Ruth had been a client of the other organization, nor did Ruth admit that she purposefully kept the information from Mosaic employees. Because of Ruth's communication difficulties, it is as likely that Ruth simply did not clearly understand or could not communicate as it is that she intended to "game the system."

In talking more with Ruth and her family as I continue to assist them to apply for Medicaid at Timothy's request, I learn that both of her sons have recently been incarcerated, and one of the two, now released from jail, is hoping to move out of state to seek employment. When I meet her again to discuss Medicaid, Ruth first is under the impression that Mosaic intends to provide her with health insurance. I explain that I can only help her apply and that applying does not guarantee insurance. When we discuss the logistics of applying for Medicaid at the Department of Family Services, Ruth explains she has no means of transportation and that she cannot miss work to apply for Medicaid if it is not a guarantee that she will receive insurance. Ruth and her family recently had to move in with a friend because her home was being fumigated, and coordinating a visit to the Department of Family Services would prove difficult considering this. After this meeting, Ruth and her family no longer answered my calls or calls from Mosaic employees.

Communication Barriers and Refugee Status Restricting Care

Ruth's communication difficulties and her hesitancy to admit when she does not understand, combined with her low income, limited her from access to health insurance and health care. For other clients of Mosaic, even after entering the medical system, other kinds of intersecting barriers can restrict the kinds of services that providers offer. I arrive at the Mosaic office one day in August, expecting to spend my time assisting with clerical work and looking through client files. Timothy explains to me that a Kurdish client of the agency, Dersima, was rushed to the emergency room the night before because of a psychiatric emergency. Dersima had an altercation with her brother, ran out of their home distraught, without shoes, and was found in a nearby park. Zahra agrees to visit Dersima, and I am able to shadow her. On the way to the hospital, Zahra informs me that Dersima was the verbally and physically abused by multiple family members before she came to the United States. When she arrived at the hospital the night before, Dersima explained to her doctor that she ran away from home because she was upset, and denied that her brother had abused her.

Upon arrival at the emergency room, and she tells a nurse that she is a case manager at Mosaic and that we are here to see Dersima. When we are allowed in Dersima's room, we see that a hospital staff member is bringing Dersima her lunch and that there is already an interpreter, who is employed by the hospital, in the room. As Zahra is speaking with the interpreter, three doctors enter the room. The doctor who seems to be Dersima's main physician begins speaking to the interpreter. As they are speaking, two more members of the hospital staff enter the room - one to take Dersima's vitals, and the other to give her medication. While all of this is going on, the attending physician asks the interpreter multiple times if Dersima's episode was a result of her abuse. He then explains to his colleagues that the patient had been a victim of physical abuse in her home country.

Eight people now are in Dersima's hospital room, and this is her first time "meeting" many of us. Lying uncomfortably on her bed, refusing her food, she obediently swallows the medication she is given. She gives her interpreter what seem to be one-word answers to the doctor's leading questions, such as "Haven't you tried to hurt yourself before?" She firmly denies being abused the night before; however, the doctor continues to refer to her as abused when speaking with staff members in the room. This diagnosis may indicate that the care Dersima believed she required and the care the doctor was providing were quite different, if only in that the doctors recommendations may have reflected circumstances of abuse that Dersima denied experiencing.

As the doctor is speaking to the others in the room, Zahra asks the interpreter to ask Dersima if she still plans to move out of her brother's house. The interpreter tells us that Dersima is hoping to move in with a friend, but because she only works part-time, she has not saved enough

money to leave yet; she hopes she will be able to leave soon. As with both Ruth and Hannah, employment was one of the goals of Dersima's treatment plan; acquiring a part-time job meant that she had achieved her employment goal. Before we leave, Zahra hugs Dersima and instructs the interpreter to tell her that she will be all right. Dersima begins to cry. Zahra tells the interpreter that she plans to visit Dersima again before she is released.

Discussion

Hannah, Ruth and Dersima, through their experiences, represent the major difficulties faced by low-income refugee: language difficulties that adversely affect self-presentation; low income; and issues of time-limited benefits and agency cynicism. Hannah is now a United States citizen, but because she is unemployed and seeking full-time employment, she is caught in a quandary of possibilities. If she acquires full-time employment and her income puts her over the poverty threshold, she will not qualify for Medicaid but may not be able to afford to buy insurance on the private market. If she remains unemployed or acquires part-time work and qualifies for Medicaid, she will have difficulty meeting her family's other financial needs. Consequently, Hannah is concerned and frustrated with her prospects. These financial constraints are compounded with the temporal impediment of her Refugee Medical Assistance ending before she could see a doctor more than once.

Refugee Medical Assistance becomes effective either the day refugees enter the United States, or the day that they are legally recognized.[17] If an individual's Refugee Medical Assistance expires before legal recognition, there is little chance to acquire healthcare services during the interim period. According to the director of Mosaic, Hannah being able to see a doctor even once while on Refugee Medical Assistance is unlikely. "Generally, it takes six months to get a Medicaid[18] card [then another] six months to get a [doctor's] appointment; by then, they have lost their insurance [because Refugee Medical Assistance ends after eight months]." Those receiving insurance through RMA are ineligible for renewal.[19] This means that in addition to the barriers of limited access to transportation and precarious employment, refugees are navigating time constraints: not only must they wait for legal recognition, but they must wait until their RMA insurance card arrives, and they must wait to get a doctor's appointment. These in-

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[17] "Access to Care," *Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center*, 2011, http://refugeehealthta.org/access-to-care/.

[18] Timothy refers to the insurance provided by the Refugee Medical Assistance program as Medicaid, because participants of the program function as Medicaid recipients.

[19] "Access to Care," *Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center*, 2011, http://refugeehealthta.org/access-to-care/.

terconnected hindrances practically ensure that non-emergency care is unavailable to these individuals. Even when obtaining emergency care, as Dersima did, an individual's refugee status may lead healthcare providers to focus on the individual's history of trauma and misdiagnose the person's condition.

Both clients and staff of Mosaic told me that accessing medical care is a priority for most of their clients; yet, because the majority of clients have low incomes, paying for medical services is rarely an option. Ruth's decision to forego applying for Medicaid in order to avoid missing work illuminates the difficult choices many refugees must make when facing financial barriers. Asgary and Segar confirm this sentiment: "When balancing the cost of medical care against other barriers such as uncertain benefit, cultural insensitivity, and a negative clinic experience, health care seeking becomes a lower priority..."[20]

Based on my observations, Mosaic's policies and practices do not always aid in the recognition or successful address of the intersecting barriers to health insurance and health care faced by their clients. For Ruth and Dersima, the agency definition of their success was the acquisition of part-time employment. However, as Hannah's concerns show, part-time employment does not typically provide insurance but may make clients ineligible for Medicaid. Further, in Ruth's case, her difficulty communicating led Mosaic employees to believe that her use of another agency was her "gaming the system." Yet, as I have documented, Ruth's tendency to give affirmative answers to hide her incomprehension may explain why she disclosed neither her HIV status nor her acquisition of services from the other agency. The lack of understanding is not willful on the part of the employees; however, there is a discrepancy in the perceptions held by staff of the agency and the lived experiences of their clients. As Mosaic is funded through a government grant, their services must be tailored to the stipulations of the grant, even if this may be at the expense of the clients' best interests. Therefore, failure to address barriers is not a problem only at the case manager/client level; rather, the policies and practices of the agency shape the experiences of clients and establish the constraints under which the case managers work.

Conclusion

When low-income refugees arrive in the United States, they face not only financial hurdles, but also structural and temporal constraints resulting from U.S. policies concerning refugees. These obstacles intersect in ways that create compounded barriers. The limited financial resources

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[20] Ramin Asgary and Nora Segar, "Barriers to Health Care Access among Refugee Asylum Seekers," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 22, no. 2 (2011): 517.

of most refugees lead to their need for Refugee Medical Assistance; yet temporal barriers impede the use of such a service. Legal recognition is required for medical appointments; once recognition is obtained, the time to acquire a medical appointment exceeds the eight months that Refugee Medical Assistance is available. These same temporal barriers restrict refugees' ability to acquire stable employment, which places them in the position of being uncovered by Medicaid for a period due to the length of the approval process. Refugees may also be wary of applying for Medicaid if they are simultaneously looking for full-time work because of the risk that their application will be denied if they make too much money. In addition to these obstacles, many refugees face language and communication barriers, as well as the necessity to self-present in certain ways to avoid impediments resulting from the perception of refugees as "others." Hannah believed that she had to alter her speech in order to avoid being recognized as a foreigner by service providers and receiving less than optimal care, in the face of navigating financial constraints. Similarly, Dersima's communication barrier prohibited her from convincing her doctor that she was not a victim of abuse, resulting in treatment based on her doctor's perception of her refugee status.

Mosaic, through its employees, aims to assist its clients through the difficulties that they face as refugees in the United States. Based on my observations, agency policies, though crafted to provide assistance, may fail to address the specific obstacles that clients face, specifically concerning health insurance and healthcare acquisition. Mosaic employees are unable to alleviate all impediments to their clients' accessing healthcare, such as the length of time that it takes to be legally recognized. However, policies based on the lived experiences of Mosaic clients facing compounded barriers may minimize the discrepancy between the assistance that clients require and the aid that is being provided by the agency, ultimately, better serving the agency's clientele. Further ethnographic research and assessment can lead to the development of policies that address these difficulties.

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A Politics of Urban Mobility: Everyday Practices and the Construction of Informal Public Transportation in Bogotá, Colombia

By ZACHARY HERNANDEZ

Abstract: In 2000, the city of Bogotá, Colombia, began a process to formalize its system of public transportation, a project that emblematized a new urban modernity through paradigms of urban sustainability and security. However, the city's informal system of transportation, made up of large fleets of small taxi-like buses called busetas, continues to operate at a large scale and are a pervasive form of public transportation for much of the working class of the city. These buses, operated by independent bus drivers organized under a consortium of private bus companies, are largely associated with precarious driving practices. As the city government and planners work to modernize public transportation through large-scale mass transit and integrative systems, the busetas have been politically constructed as the foils of urban modernity. This article provides an ethnographic account of everyday journeys within Bogotá's informal buses in order to understand the production of mobile space and articulation of mobile practices. It sets out a politics of mobility in Bogotá and takes into consideration the ways in which the busetas have posed a challenge to local governance while at the same time accounts for a large amount of the daily lived experience of mobility in the city.

Introduction

　　Shortly after my arrival to Bogotá, Colombia, my host, Cesar, offered to accompany me on a trip from our neighborhood, Santa Isabel, to the city center so that I could learn firsthand how to utilize local transportation to travel to there. Leaving the house in the early afternoon, we take a short walk to *Calle 2*, "2nd Street." After arriving at the roadway, lined with small stores and divided by a thin grassy median, we stand near a traffic light. Although there are no bus signs along the sidewalk, Cesar assures me that two buses pass through here. After waiting a few minutes, he points my attention to a small green *buseta* (mini-bus) in the distance

travelling towards us. As it approaches, we see the words *EL CENTRO* inscribed on a tall yellow board placed on its dashboard. Cesar turns himself towards the bus and extends his right arm out into the street. The bus driver, spotting the gesture, swerves in our direction and brings the bus to a screeching halt as it unfolds open its noisy glass doors. We climb up onto the bus and in no time the small vehicle jolts forward and continues its journey. After handing money directly to the bus driver, who promptly returns the necessary change, Cesar and I inch our way down a narrow aisle while grasping the hand railing above and find two seats in the back. The bus continues to weave through neighborhood streets, occasionally stopping for passengers, some elderly and needing the assistance of others to enter the bus, some men dressed in brown suits, or others younger with more casual wear. We pass small businesses, corner stores, and continue down narrow streets filled with an array of vehicles and sidewalks buzzing with pedestrian activity. When we finally make it to the major roadway that leads to downtown, we are met with an unexpected obstacle. Despite it being in the middle of the day and between peak hours, the street is jammed with traffic. Overhearing murmurings among the passengers around me, I learn that there is a scheduled march in the city center that must be blocking the roads ahead. Frustrated, a few men start shouting towards the front of the bus, "*La Séptima! La Séptima! Más rápido!*" (Seventh Street is quicker!). The bus creeps forward, and then abruptly, when the driver makes up his mind, we speed past the intersection. A feeling of excitement fills the bus; people are looking around, scanning the unexpected new surroundings, talking a little bit more and grinning as a cool wind flows through the bus. Cesar explains to me that this "*nueva ruta*" (new route) is only taken when the bus driver tries to avoid traffic.

A degree of uncertainty characterizes travel within Bogotá's informal system of buses, colloquially referred to as *transporte colectivo* (collective transportation). Although the city government issues permits to private transportation companies to operate fleets of these small vehicles along specified roadways, bus operators are known to tactfully deviate from established routes to avoid overly congested traffic conditions and to transport their passengers more quickly to their destinations. To an outsider like myself, these routes are often cryptic. With no predetermined stops or published maps of these buses, navigating them relies mainly on local knowledge. The residents of Santa Isabel are experts on how to utilize the three to four bus routes that travel through their neighborhood. As a newcomer to the community, they made sure to accompany me whenever I was to learn a new route so that I wouldn't get lost on the wrong bus. Throughout my two-month stay in Bogotá during the summer of 2013, I observed the ways in which the residents I interacted with in this middle-class neighborhood not only navigated different forms of transportation, but also how mobility in the city had became a salient urban reality in

their daily lives. It is clear, however, that these informal mobile practices lie outside of Bogotá's image of urban modernity.

In the years leading to the new millennium, the mayors of Bogotá lead initiatives to transform the urban culture of the city largely through projects related to the recuperation of public space and strengthening of public services.[1] The underlying impetus for many of these projects lay in the city's history of urban violence and the prevalent sense of vehicular chaos largely attributed to rapid growth of the city. At the forefront of these urban interventions for the Colombian capital was a project to engineer a system of mass transportation, which for the city government and transportation planners meant formalizing and thus modernizing its system of public transportation. In 2000, the city launched a new system of mass transportation called TransMilenio. As an alternative to the informal buses, the new system of bus rapid transit (BRT) was planned to provide a more efficient form of collective travel; the elongated TransMilenio buses move station to station along designated lanes of the city's main roadways, which offers a more direct unilinear form of displacement along predetermined routes. Today transnational urban planning organizations such as the World Resources Institute and EMBARQ encourage developing countries that are rapidly urbanizing, especially in Asia and Latin America, to implement BRT systems because they are "sustainable, high-impact, and [a] relatively low-cost transport solution." As one of the first large-scale BRT projects, TransMilenio was heralded as a harbinger of more "efficient" and "environmentally friendly" transportation systems in the global south.[2]

Whereas TransMilenio is equated to a new urban modernity legitimatized by paradigms of urban sustainability and rationality, Bogotá's system of informal transportation is often situated as the foil of such a vision. This is largely attributed to the everyday practices surrounding the busetas, which make up the city's fleet of informal public transportation. This article provides an ethnographic account of everyday journeys within Bogotá's informal buses in order to understand the production of mobile space and articulation of informal practices. It will also situate transportation in Bogotá within a history of urbanization and modernization in Colombia, explain shifting trends in urban governance, and then account for the everyday experience travelling on informal urban transportation. An ethnographic examination of these ad hoc practices shows how the busetas afford their passengers a degree of economic and spatial flexibility however

[1] María Fabiola Pardo. *Territorialidades cívicas: espacio público y cultura urbana en Bogotá, Colombia.* Diss. Department of Latin American Studies (TCLA), Faculty of Arts, Leiden University, 2007.

[2] Dario Hidalgo and Aileen Carrigan."Modernizing Public Transportation–Lessons Learned From Major Bus Improvements in Latin America and Asia."*EMBARQ The WRI Center for Sustainable Transport*, 2010. *Transport*,Washington,DC (2010).

at the price of creating risky situations for riders.

I documented the everyday practices surrounding public transportation over the course of two months through extensive field observations, in which I chronicled experiences, observations, and conversations in and around buses in Bogotá. In this first-hand account of daily trips on traditional buses, I describe how riding different and often opposing forms of transportation in the city represent various ways of interacting with the urban environment, relating with cultural others, and conceiving of the state. Users of public transportation continually negotiate the use of buses, taking into consideration the state versus private companies, their destination, travels times, and various physicalities and materialities relating to each trip. Plans for the city's public transportation were described to me in semi-structured interviews with three transportation experts and reflect the ways in which the city's planning elite imagines urban mobility. In addition, this account is geographically situated within the neighborhood of Santa Isabel, a middle class urban residential neighborhood in the southern outskirts of downtown and where I stayed with a host family throughout my time in the city. Much of what I learned about life in Bogotá was informed by my everyday interactions with this family and others I encountered in and around the neighborhood.

Setting a Lens for Mobility

An investigation of urban transportation can be understood through the lens of mobility, a key paradigm in the discipline of geography and sociology that describes the multitude of trajectories, movements, and displacements that have become salient characteristics of contemporary society. A catchall term to refer to diverse topics such as migration, transportation, technology, communication, and tourism, mobility is conceived as a relationship through which the world is understood and seeks to recognize the growing movement of people, goods, and information as a result of processes such as globalization and urbanization. In addition, a "politics of mobility" examines the ways in which different aspects of mobility are implicated in the production and reproduction of power relations.[3] Tim Cresswell, a key contributor to the field of movement in geography, posits that "mobility, and particularly the represented meanings associated with particular practices, is highly political."[4] Mobility, as it will be applied in the article, serves as a theoretical concept that will allow us to conceive of movement at different scales, especially as it relates to urbanization as well as urban spatial practices. In addition, the article positions public transportation as means of everyday urban mobility, especially for the working

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3 Tim Cresswell. "Towards a Politics of Mobility." *Environment and planning. D, Society and space* 28, no. 1 (2010): 17-31.
4 Ibid, 21.

class of the city.

Mobile practices are the particular ways of moving, such as walking or driving, as well as the way it which it is embodied and habitualized.[5] In mobility studies, mobile practices, or the act of being mobile, is discussed in terms of its capability to stir new cultural forms and imaginaries about the city.[6] The flâneur, Walter Benjamin's quintessential urban subject, ambles the city with his or her private thoughts, interpretations, and imaginations of the city.[7] In addition, Néstor García Canclini discusses how urban travel within the urban landscape becomes a visual phenomenon in which passengers encounter others and launch imaginaries about experiences of the city in a variety of ways.[8] His work tracking the everyday movement of people across the city demonstrates how travel can be used as a lens to examine mobile lived experiences. Thus, the concept of practice has become a useful way of conceiving of mobility as it is actualized and perceived on the ground. Lastly, Tim Cresswell urges to "[consider] the *historical* existence of fragile senses of movement, meaning and practice that each entailed forms of mobilite politics and regulation."[9] The following section will work to situate contemporary contestations of mobility within a history of societal modernization and urbanization in Colombia.

Modernization and Urbanization in Colombia

Western historians such as Bushnell and Henderson regard the twentieth century in Colombia as an era of modernization, which chiefly involved rapid urbanization and capitalist economic development. This stands in contrast with the previous century when Colombia, like much of the Latin American region in the nineteenth century, maintained a relative status of isolation and social stasis. At the turn of the century, the country experienced internal political stabilization and rapid integration into the global market economy with chief exports such as coffee, for example. Bogotá, as the nation's political epicenter and global economic gateway, underwent the most growth in the country and was an indicator of how modernization was largely an urban phenomenon. As the country's urban manufacturing sector expanded, especially that of textile production and construction trade, the city provided a sense of economic opportunity and upward social mobility. By the end of the nineteenth century the population of Bogotá was at 100,000 residents; at the time of the mid-1930s, Bogotá's population had reached a third of a million and by the mid-century

5 Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

6 Peter Adey. *Mobility.* (Routledge, 2009).

7 Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

8 Néstor García Canclini, Alejandro Castellanos, and Ana Rosas Mantecón. *La ciudad de los viajeros: travesías e imaginarios urbanos*, México, 1940-2000 (Grijalbo, 1996).

9 Cresswell, "Towards a Politics of Mobility," 19.

that number had doubled. During this early half of the century, increased vehicular movement within the city became an indicator of its growth and evolving needs. Recognizing the importance of urban circulation in a time of continual expansion, two of the municipality's dynamic mayors Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (1936) and Carlos Sanz de Santamaría (1942-1944) worked to extend much of the city's infrastructure, including public transportation.[10] However, as chronicled by Colombian urban historian Julián Vargas Lesmes, this era saw the gradual privatization of public transportation services, a process that spans multiple decades and the effects of which are still experienced today.[11]

Before the late 1880s, the roadways in and around Bogotá were in such poor condition, exacerbated by the region's wet climate, that wheeled carts were not a practical mode of transportation. The inconvenience of travel in and out of the city further isolated Bogotá, especially as a capital located in a mountainous region away from major waterways. "The cost of transportation," Vargas remarks, "was greater from Bogotá to Honda (the river port city about 50 miles northwest) than from England to Honda."[12] Therefore, the principle form of travel at this time was by foot.[13] However by the 1870s, better drainage and the construction of the city's underground aqueduct allowed, for some roads at least, better conditions for wheeled vehicles. By the 1880s, the city's first form of collective transportation, "Omnibus," emerged. The service consisted of horse-drawn carts primarily used by passengers travelling in and out of the city. Within the urban setting, transportation drastically evolved upon the inauguration in 1884 of the city's first "urban railway," brought about through an agreement with the North American businessman Frank Allen to form The Bogotá City Railway Company. The system, known as the *tranvía*, initially comprised of a few dozen mule-drawn streetcars that utilized wooden rails and connected the central plaza, *Plaza de Bolívar*, with the burgeoning San Diego and Chapinero neighborhoods about 20 and 50 blocks north. The new system of transportation contributed to the growth of these neighborhoods as well as the city's linear expansion northward from the traditional colonial city center. However, a feeling of discontent brewed among citizens and passengers, who complained about a number of irritating conditions includ-

10 David Bushnell. *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (University of California Press, 1993); James D Henderson. Modernization in Colombia: The Laureano Gómez Years, 1889-1965 (University Press of Florida, 2001).

11 Julián Vargas, Fabio Zambrano, Juan Díaz, Vincent Goueset, Fabio Giraldo, Hernando González, Néstor López, and Irma Andrade. *Bogotá, 450 años: retos y realidades.* Vol. 36. Foro Nacional por Colombia, 1988.

12 Ibid, 24.

13 José Miguel Alba Castro. "Crisis del crecimiento o ausencia de infraestructuras." *Revista Bitácora Urbano Territorial* 1, no. 7 (2003): 6-12.

ing the noise brought about by the streetcars as well as its crowded state. In addition to this and the perceived overall low quality of its operation, citizens criticized the company for not being Colombian-owned.[14] After a three-month boycott of the service in 1910, the city took over operation of the streetcars. Although the municipally operated streetcars continued to expand and increase ridership as new urban neighborhoods emerged farther and farther from the city center, the system soon began to compete with the nascent arrival of automobiles.

Although having gradually been incorporated into the urban environment in the previous decade, the use of private automobiles flourished in the 1920s. From 1923 to 1927 the number of automobiles increased from 360 to 1,100.[15] The second half of the decade also saw the expansion of the buses in the traffic fleet with the appearance of the first private bus companies, an area of collective transportation that the city struggled to acquire. Although taking a secondary position to the Municipal Streetcar Company, which continued to carry more passengers, the buses played an important role in transporting users to neighborhoods that the streetcars did not yet reach. The relatively rapid proliferation of automobile traffic in the streets of Bogotá greatly affected the urban environment, especially that of the streets. Increased vehicular movement in a once pedestrian-centered environment proved dangerous to walkers, who grew frustrated not only of the risk automobiles created but also the invasion of walking space. The movement of automotive traffic was also noisy, especially from the excessive honking of car horns. This as well as a general lack of codified driving rules created a novel sense of street-centered chaos and prompted municipal intervention through enthusiastic regulations. The first political body to address the ordering of transportation was established in 1927 and in 1931 the first traffic lights were installed in the city. In 1941, by which time the automobile movement almost exclusively occupied the roadways, the city initiated regulations on stopping and unloading zones, placed 3,000 new traffic signs, and reinforced rules against excessive honking. Although throughout this period both the streetcars and bus transportation coexisted, the streetcars began a gradual process of decline and eventual disappearance.

The city's rapid urbanization, which in the periphery was often unplanned and deviated from the city's linear grid of streets, was ultimately a formidable adversary for the streetcars. The continual expansion of the city's peripheral neighborhoods as well as the demand for new routes were more readily met by the buses, which provided a more flexible and faster means of travel. Between 1931 and 1941, the number of private buses more

14 Vargas, *Bogotá, 450 años.*
15 Ibid, 26.

than doubled from 200 to 500.[16] Meanwhile the *tranvía*, which was more conducive to linear means of urban growth, continued to be criticized for its sluggishness as well as its crowded conditions and noise. In 1944 Mayor Sanz de Santamaría proposed the municipal incorporation of the system of buses, however the bus companies, whose strength had grown over time, ultimately resisted. "The final blow"[17] to the system of streetcars was endured on one of the most infamous days in Bogotá's history. On April 9, 1948, former mayor and then popular leader of the Liberal Party, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, was assassinated while exiting his office. Upon news of the murder, the city entered into uncontrollable riots known as *El Bogotazo*. At the time of the riots 34 of the streetcars were demolished and left in flames while much of the city center was destroyed.[18] With about a third of the streetcars devastated, the private buses had an advantage in providing transportation services in vital roadways previously occupied by the streetcars. The streetcars, after a sudden drop in ridership, ultimately ceased operation in 1951. By 1957, 18 companies operated 1,800 private buses, a means of transportation that would proliferate in the city for the following decades.

It was in this fervent urban context, enduring the aftermath of *El Bogotazo* and continual pervasiveness of private and deemed chaotic transportation, that the nation's young architect community embraced modernization and urbanization through principles of architectural modernism. This urban planning movement stressed order and rationality through comprehensive citywide planning. As a sign of the Bogotá's budding sense of cosmopolitanism, the municipal government welcomed an urban planning proposal from Le Corbusier, renowned Swiss French modernist architect and urban planner. Co-developed with Josep Lluís Sert and his associate Paul Lester Weiner from Town Planning Associates in New York, the plan focused on the creation of new civic city center as well as integrated system of roads and highways that would order vehicular traffic in the city.[19] However, the plans were never carried out, primarily as a result of the country's deteriorating political landscape. As soon as final aspects of the plan were being put in place, national political strife in a civil war known as the period of *La Violencia* as well as the American-backed leftist military dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla in 1953-1957 slowed down the process. Only a few aspects of the plan were adopted in a period for Colombia called the "National Front," when left and right political constituencies alternat-

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[16] Vargas, *Bogotá, 450 años.*

[17] Vargas, *Bogotá, 450 años*, 82.

[18] Ibid, 83.

[19] María Cecilia O'Byrne. "Le Corbusier en Bogotá, 1947-1951." *LC BOG: Le Corbusier en Bogotá, 1947-1951*. (Universidad de Los Andes, Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño, 2010).

ed power at four-year intervals.[20] Nonetheless, this surge of mid-century modernism that engrossed the country's planning elite signaled a new desire for compressive city ordering and planning.

Much of the violence that plagued the streets of Bogotá spread to the rest of the country and was a precursor for this ten-year civil war, *La Violencia*. Although the two main parties, Liberals and Conservatives, came to an agreement to share power from 1958, this was to be the beginning of the guerrilla war that has continued to the present day.[21] Since the mid¬–twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of peasants from the Colombian countryside have migrated to the capital city, either seeking economic opportunity or having been displaced from their land by paramilitaires, guerillas, or the army.[22] However, despite turmoil in the country, the growth of Colombian city's happened congruently with a continued process of societal modernization, urbanization, and industrialization. In this era, the country experienced a surge of economic growth in part due to industrial output. However, the end of the National Front led to an era of political instability. Meanwhile, unplanned urbanization and relatively little mayoral vision and leadership subsumed the capital.[23] Since the 1970s, criminal activity increased in the city, heightening levels of urban insecurity. It wouldn't be until the 1990s when constitutional reforms saw the strengthening of the local government's capacity to implement infrastructural projects that would work to secure the city as well as strengthen its political legitimacy.

TransMilenio and Public Transport Planning as Governmental Intent

During my time in Bogotá I had the opportunity to sit down and talk to Darío Hidalgo, a transportation specialist with EMBARQ and former Deputy General Manager of TransMilenio. During the interview, Hidalgo proudly spoke about the way he felt he helped bring about positive change to the city by working on the TransMilenio project,

> "[With] the adequate levels of funding, you can do it right. You transform the city, from the city that is thought and made for cars, to a city that is thought and made for people, and that was the vision of Enrique Peñalosa. I was alive with that vision before

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[20] Eric Paul Mumford. "Josep Lluís Sert: the CIAM Heart of the City and the Bogotá Plan: Precursor to Urban Design, 1947-1953." *Maria Cecilia O'Byrne Orozco, ed., Le Corbusier en Bogotá. 1947-1951.* 2 (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 2010): 240-249.

[21] Reinhard Skinner. "City Profile Bogotá." *Cities* 21, no. 1 (2004): 73-81.

[22] Austin Zeiderman. "On Shaky Ground: the Making of Risk in Bogotá." *Environment and Planning-Part A* 44.7 (2012): 1570.

[23] María Fabiola Pardo. *Territorialidades cívicas: espacio público y cultura urbana en Bogotá.* Univ Externado de Colombia, 2008.

I was working with him. It's not that I learned that vision with him, but I was so happy to be able to help make, as part of a large team, this vision a reality."[24]

At the start of this excerpt from our interview, Hidalgo suggested the importance of the political economic conditions that were a necessary precursor to the implementation of this project. In addition, he reinforced the idea of "vision" as an underlying component towards the actualization of this infrastructural transformation of which he was a part. Later in the interview he mentioned how this vision aligns with the principles of New Urbanism, an urban design movement that advocates for the walkability of cities. This "vision" also targets car-based travel as problematic for the city and ultimately works against the people as a collective body.

In an appropriation of Henri Lefebvre's slogan, David Harvey uses the idea of the "right to the city" to call attention to the ways in which cities have the potential to resist individualism and garner collective rights.[25] In crafting such a manifesto, Harvey touts urbanization as a process historically linked to the development of capitalism and is thus related to inherent class-related inequalities. "The claim to the right to the city," Harvey declares, "is to claim some kind of shaping power over the process of urbanization."[26] Previously this article sketched an historical account of societal urbanization and modernization in Colombia as it related to issues of urban mobility. This next section works to show the ways in which urban planners and city officials in Bogotá have claimed the right to the city by targeting urban transportation as an area through which they could address these issues of urbanization.

Bogotá has approached issues of intense urbanization through a redefinition of urban politics. Shifting forms of governance have given increased autonomy to local municipalities and enhanced the role of mayors. The process of decentralization and democratization is a widespread trend in Latin American cities and since the 1980s has given increased power to local governments.[27] In 1986 constitutional reforms in Colombia brought about a new policy that allowed for the free election of mayoral leaders, who before were directly appointed by the president.[28] This policy was enumerated in the 1991 national constitution and in effect granted local

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[24] Interview with Darío Hidalgo 2013.

[25] David Harvey. "The Right to the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 4 (2003): 939-941.

[26] Harvey, 941.

[27] Alan Gilbert. "Good Urban Governance: Evidence from a Model City?" *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25, no. 3 (2006): 392-419.

[28] Alan Gilbert and Julio D. Dávila. "Bogotá: progress within a Hostile Environment" in *Capital City Politics in Latin America: Democratization and Empowerment*, ed. David J. Meyers and Henry A. Dietz (Lynne Rienner Pub: 2002): 29-63.

governments more responsibilities to improve the quality of life and even security their cities.

The advent of these nationwide reforms came in a particularly violent time in Colombian urban life. The decision to decentralize power was partially aided by the idea that increased local control would reduce levels of violence in the country, especially conflicts relating to civic strikes, guerilla movements, and drug-related violence. In light of such overarching trends in governance, politically focused scholarly works have credited decentralization and democratization for inciting "good governance" in the capital,[29] as well as spurring dramatic transformations and appropriations of urban spaces for public use.[30] New institutional arrangements gave local governmental bodies the financial leverage to institute public works projects by increasing their ability to raise sources of revenue and taxes.[31] In the late 1990s, the years preceding the development of the TransMilenio project, Bogotá doubled its tax revenues largely though an increase in the gasoline tax, which provided much of the funds needed to invest in infrastructure projects relating to road networks and public transport.[32] In Bogotá, two progressive mayors in the late 1990s and early 2000s received considerable attention and popularity for leading widespread social and spatial changes in the city. Both mayors focused on citizenship and played a part in shifting daily behaviors and appropriating urban spaces for public use. This was most profoundly demonstrated by the restructuring of public transportation through the TransMilenio bus rapid transit project.

TransMilenio was conceived in hopes that it would function as a mechanism of democratization in a socioeconomically polarized city. "The real class conflict," says Enrique Peñalosa, "in developing countries is between those with cars and the rest of society."[33] By transforming car lanes into bus lanes, this project, has he imagined it, would connect the entire city so that every citizen, whether rich or poor, could move throughout the city. Additionally, the name TransMilenio, which literally means "to the millennium," was not only given to recognize the starting point of the year 2000, but to improve the image of buses, which Peñalosa saw as having a "bad image for being for the poor."[34] Later in my interview with Darío Hidalgo,

[29] Gilbert, 394.

[30] Michael G Donovan. "Informal Cities and the Contestation of Public Space: The Case of Bogotá's Street Vendors, 1988—2003." *Urban Studies* 45, no. 1 (2008): 29-51.

[31] Julio D. Dávila. "Being a Mayor: the View From Four Colombian Cities." *Environment and Urbanization* April 2009, 21: 37-57.

[32] Ricardo Montezuma. "The Transformation of Bogota, Colombia, 1995–2000: Investing in Citizenship and Urban Mobility." *Global Urban Development* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1-10.

[33] Andreas Dalsgaard, dir. *Cities on Speed: Bogotá Change*, 2009. Film.

[34] Gary Hustwit, dir. *Urbanized.* 2011. Film.

he spoke to the ways in which the project is meant to bring about meaningful change in the city. Throughout the interview, Hidalgo described Mayor Enrique Peñalosa as a "visionary" and that "…before Peñalosa there was no vision for the city." After asking Hidalgo to expand on what that vision entailed, he explained that it ultimately addressed the "need to think differently about how people move" by prioritizing pedestrians, cycling, and public transportation. The perpetuation of vision emphasizes the planner's position as acting on behalf of the "public good" and "public interest" and asserts urban planning as a valuable tool in the struggle for justice and the right to the city. However, critiques of planning as a governmental technique for social good point to the ways in which planning can totalize the urban experience as well as have the potential to ignore marginalized groups.[35] In the case of public transportation in Bogotá, planning efforts by municipal governing bodies have focused on formalizing transportation by targeting risky driving practices. Although these efforts work as a securitizing mechanism for passengers, these planning interventions point to prevalent social divisions in the city.

Transportation and Fragmentation

      Bogotá is separated into 20 localities, which groups more than 1,200 neighborhoods in the city. The neighborhood of Santa Isabel is located in the *Los Mártires* district. Although maintaining pockets of slow-paced residential blocks, a grid-like matrix of roadways run through the neighborhood and colors the urban landscape as noticeably vehicular. The area's nearest major roadway is *Carerra 30* (30th Avenue), which delineates the western border of the neighborhood. The highway also supports dense automobile traffic as well as a line of TransMilenio. The bus rapid transit station, named Santa Isabel, is part of the line that runs from the most southern to the most northern terminals. The street is often bustling with a flow of traffic that comes in waves, at which point a mix of yellow taxis, private cars, and green busetas make their way down the road, leaving trails of dark smoke and the smell of diesel that permeates the surrounding areas. One of the neighborhood's most important streets is *Calle 2* (2nd Street), which runs perpendicular to *Carerra 30*. Although the top levels of the two- to three-story buildings that form a row on either side of the roadway are residential, the street level is distinctly commercial. Most of the buildings house small eateries, hardware shops, bakeries, and convenient stores. Many of the buildings without commercial spaces have one-car parking slots barred from the street by sturdy iron gates.

      One afternoon while walking down *Calle 2*, I encounter an elder

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[35] Kurt Iveson and Ruth Fincher. "'Just Diversity' in the City of Difference," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 407-418.

man standing patiently outside of a hardware shop. Curious to learn more about the neighborhood, I approach the man, introduce myself, and ask about Santa Isabel. After introducing himself as Luis Enrique, he explains to me that he is the owner of this shop as well as a resident of the neighborhood, residing just two blocks away. He then tells me that each of the barrios (neighborhoods) in the city act as their own centers of activity. Santa Isabel, he explained, has many shops and stores as well as other important sites such as the church, small parks, and clinics, all of which the neighborhood residents have walkable access to. After informing Luis Enrique about my interest in learning more about public transportation, he retorts that he generally disdains transportation in the city. He explains that because his work and home are near each other, there is not much reason for him to leave the area. In his opinion, "transporte es horrible" (transportation is horrible), so he tries to avoid it at all costs. In this encounter, Luis Enrique describes how many of the neighborhoods of Bogotá, including Santa Isabel, act as centers of activity as well as a place of movement and departure. The storeowner's remarks offer an alternative perspective to urban mobility and draws attention to the barriers citizens perceive transportation posses. Although urban transportation is envisioned to breakdown spatial barriers, this vision of the planning elite doesn't always align with the actual cultural-material development of the city.

      The urban fabric of Bogotá is laden with spatial segregation and fragmentation. Fragmentation, according to Marcello Balbo, is the antithesis of the Western industrial city, where master planning has been instrumental in shaping order and spatial integration.[36] "Due to its primary origins in engineering and architecture, 'order,' 'integration,' 'balance,' and 'unity' were always among the primary goals of master plans directed at the construction of a well-defined and controllable spatial organization."[37] Balbo describes fragmentation primarily as a feature of the developing city's built environment, which is split between planned districts and various types of illegal settlements. These peripheral zones of the city mainly rely on the informal economy, which is characterized by locally adapted ways of meeting everyday needs. These spatial arguments heighten Marxian productions of urban space, which emphasize the ways in which processes of industrialization and urbanization configure class related spatial segregation.[38] Fragmentation is also reproduced in the rhythms and routines of daily life even in those who consider themselves at the center. According to Arenas, fragmentation creates spatial routines that "allow for the pres-

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[36] Marcello Balbo. "Urban planning and the Fragmented City of Developing Countries." *Third World Planning Review* 15, no. 1 (1993): 23.

[37] Ibid, 24.

[38] Kanishka Goonewardena, et al., eds. *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*. (Routledge, 2008).

ervation of privacy and closeness of individuals, as well as balance and partially solve the tension between freedom and security."[39] In this context, an examination of public transportation demonstrates how this theme of fragmentation is also imposed upon differing mobile spaces and how perceptions of security within these environments perpetuate class divisions.

Formalizing Informal Practices and Space

Although providing a public service and for decades serving as the city's system of public transportation, informal collective transportation is largely associated with private interest. Dozens of private bus companies operate fleets of buses. Historically, the economic competiveness of the busetas gave rise to what in Bogotá is referred to as the *Guerra del Centavo*, "Penny War," which to this day is used as an epithet referring to the informal buseta practices.[40] Cesar, my host and former buseta driver also mentioned the name after I asked him to describe how collective transportation has changed throughout the years. He described the Penny War as an era in the city when the busetas were encouraged to compete aggressively with one another to pick up passengers from the street. Because the bus drivers were paid based on the number of passengers that entered their bus, the drivers were encouraged to race and speed in front of one another to reach waiting riders. Whereas many identify the Penny War as a prevailing urban reality in the city today, Cesar situated it has a phenomenon of the past. He explained to me that this wasn't a prevalent problem because the district government subsequently set up policies that allowed bus drivers to be paid for the numbers of hours worked rather than the number of passengers they picked up. However, he stressed that this has drastically extended most bus driver's working hours, operating buses from around 4:30am to 8:00pm while working everyday but Sunday.

For transportation planners, the end of the Penny War won't arrive until the formalization of collective transportation in the city. This project is currently being realized through the implementation of the Integrated System of Public Transportation (SITP), one of the flagship projects outlined in the Master Plan of Mobility (PMM) that was adopted by the city administration in 2006. The plan is explicitly interested in planning transportation in the city as rational and efficient.[41] Although a select number of existing transportation companies have been bestowed concessions to operate the buses, under SITP, buses across the city will become standardized and made legible. Namely, SITP buses are all painted blue and will

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[39] Oscar Iván Salazar Arenas. "Seguridad y libertad: lugar y espacio en las relaciones familia individuo en Bogotá." *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 29 (2008): 140.
[40] Fernando Araújo Vélez. "El fin de la guerra del centavo." *El Espectador,* November 2007. Accessed February 6, 2014. http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/cuadernilloa/bogota/articuloimpreso-el-fin-guerra-del-centavo.
[41] Found on http://www.movilidadbogota.gov.co/?sec=170.

be numbered; they are also required to pick up and drop off passengers at designated bus stops. SITP also calls for the formal training of the bus drivers themselves, who will be required to wear uniforms as well as complete courses on etiquette, first aid, and interpersonal relationships.[42] In terms of structural changes, SITP, according to the city government and transportation advisors, imposes stricter regulations on the buses and will foster more cooperation among bus companies.

The formalization of collective transportation, in this liminal stage during which the city exists with both formal and informal, is creating more divisions between formal and informal use of city buses. Although *los azules* (the blue ones), as they are referred to by community residents, are small enough to travel through the neighborhood streets like the busetas, they take different routes as well as require passengers to prepay for their trips using small plastic cards that can be bought and have money added too at participating convenient stores. The novelty of these buses disrupted the local knowledge accrued with the neighborhood, which has resulted in a lack of passengers. According to local news reports, the deficit is largely attributed to competition with other forms of transport, including the "informal."[43] Local neighborhood residents, who often pointed out to me how empty the blue buses looked as they drove through Santa Isabel, offered their own insights on the matter. They shared with me that the new blue buses deter older passengers, who are accustomed to paying for transportation services trip by trip as opposed to prepaying with a card. "They want to physically see the money they are using to pay for their ride," Amparo shares with me. Much of the confusion, even for those who are equipped to pay by card, also stems from having to use separate cards to utilize TransMilenio and the SITP buses.[44] Nevertheless, those who have accepted the new form of transportation and are more comfortable navigating them expressed their positive thoughts to me, further distinguishing an image of who uses either system of bus.

Early one morning I accompany Yass, a neighborhood resident, on her commute to work using a blue SITP bus. After asking her what she feels the differences between the busetas and the blue buses are, she responded with many points. She shared with me that generally the SITP buses are "más cómodo" (more comfortable]) and "más seguro" (safer). For

[42] Fernando Araújo Vélez. "El fin de la guerra del centavo." *El Espectador*, November 2007. Accessed February 6, 2014. http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/cuadernilloa/bogota/articuloimpreso-el-fin-guerra-del-centavo.

[43] *El Tiempo*. "Ninguno de los 'Transmilenios' del país se salva de líos financieros." September 26, 2013. Accessed February 6, 2014. http://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/ARTICULOWEB-NEW_NOTA_INTERIOR-13084862.html.

[44] *El Tiempo*. "Aprenda a usar las tarjetas del SITP en Bogotá." October 29, 2013. Accessed November 12, 2013. http://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/bogota/desenrede-el-lo-de-la-doble-tarjeta-del-sitp_13148576-4.

example, she feels safe bringing out her phone, something she doesn't feel comfortable doing on the busetas. She elaborates by saying that the people who ride the new buses are of a professional class. "Hay gente fea" (there are ugly people) on the other buses. This characterization of passengers of the busetas and informal transportation demonstrates the ways in which social divisions between informal and formal transportations are mediated by perceptions of security and personal safety. The standardization of buses, although offering a sense of control and safety, underscores social divisions through different modes of travel. It is here from which I would like to begin a more nuanced account of informal transportation in Bogotá. An ethnographic description of urban travel on the busetas demonstrates the ways in which these mobile spaces are navigated with extensive local knowledge and flexibility.

Mobile Interruptions: Examining Bogotá's Informal Transportation

I returned to the city center by *buseta* once again. The time was 2:30 in the afternoon, between peak hours. After boarding the bus, I took the first available seat, which was right in the front above the entrance door. This was a new perspective of the bus. What most surprised me the most was a small audio speaker on the ceiling of the bus that was playing music. Although the music was indistinct and at times washed out by the ruckus of the street and loud engine noise, this was the first time that I had noticed music being played within the bus. The speaker was almost directly in the front and was playing softly, but nonetheless this was a novel observation. The driver was wearing a white short-sleeved button up shirt with long dark pants. He wore a thin black mustache and dark hair that fell messily on his forehead. The bus driver didn't say much and seemed to stay calm on the trip. He seemed used to all of the challenging conditions the road presented. At times we were brought to halt by traffic ahead, he would lean forward on the wheel, bring his right hand up to his mustache to hold his head, and appeared pensive. A few whimsical objects in his front cockpit also surrounded the driver. A pair of yellow fuzzy dice hung from the middle of the windshield, a stuffed animal character clung to the top right corner of the windshield, attached by four small rubber suction cups placed on each of its hands and feet. Although music continues to play, it is overtaken by the mechanics of the bus and other vehicles on the road, from horn honking to the roaring engine. Large blasts of noise fill the bus when the doors of the bus open. Occasionally the doors of the bus don't close while the bus is still in motion, so the street and engine noises are even louder. Small thin rectangular sliding windows line the bus and a few are open to let air out the bus, which often starts to get very hot. Sound also makes its way through here. Another song in Spanish and a traditional Colombian sound starts to play on the speaker. I am under impression that the music is playing from a radio station, but because the music is so faint

I can't quite tell. We finally make it out of the neighborhood and onto the main street, where we were met with some traffic. Passengers in this leg of the trip became quieter and a few keep their eyes shut. Some of them appeared to be successfully dozing off while others seemed to be trying to block out their surroundings, sitting upright and eyebrows slightly furrowed. The bus started to become hot and smell more of fumes the more we were surrounded by traffic.

Both the playing of the radio as well as the appearance of personal objects in the bus point to the personalization of this particular space, which stands in contrast to the standardized image of TransMilenio and the SITP buses. Through the playing of music the bus driver intentionally shapes the aural environment, heightening the bus driver's intent to make the passengers comfortable on some level. Its presence also seems to relax the bus driver, who encounters stressful conditions on the busy roadways. At the same time, the physical realities and mechanics of the often turbulent trip are unavoidably dominant aspects of the perceptual and somatic experience of this trip. In this regard, the music calls to mind the need for relief against the seemingly exhausting sounds from the exterior. In addition, the use of personal objects to decorate the driver's space signal a sense of ownership to driver feels with his vehicle. Upon entering the bus, passengers hand over cash directly to bus driver. At this moment the bus driver and passenger enter into a contract that bus driver will provide a reliable private service to the passengers. This personalization of mobile services also lends itself to a sort of flexibility, both in bus driving practices, as evidenced in the introduction, but also for passengers. These trips are then subject to the judgment of the bus driver themselves as opposed to standardized bus environments and routes.

De Certeau, another key contributor in the field of spatial studies, distinguishes place as the geometrical configurations and space as an assemblage of movement. A space is a "frequented place," "an intersection between moving bodies."[45] It is the mobile subject who transforms the place, geometrically defined by the town planner, into a space. De Certeau suggests that a focus on such spatial practices, for example walking, is a way of examining how the built environment and urban form are subverted and space is reappropriated by everyday users. In contrast, "the concept city" is a way of looking at the city in a holistic manner; it is urbanistic, universal, rational and readable, acting as the "machinery and the hero of modernity."[46] Here De Certeau's study of everyday practices in the city again brings to light the tensions between the urbanist's model of the city and the daily practitioner of space. Clifford expands on this concept of spatial

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[45] Michel De Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[46] Ibid, 95.

practices and challenges researchers in the field to consider cultures not as determined and isolated localities, but as "traversed spaces."[47] Instead of considering mobility as movement between spaces, the space itself should be considered that which is traversed by people, materials and information and is shaped by these movements, interferences, and interactions. Both De Certeau and Clifford empower the everyday practitioner of movement as the cultural bodies involved in constructing social place and space and are important theoretical considerations when examining mobile practices surrounding collective transportation. For example, exiting as well as entering the bus are unique ways in which collective transport allow for the negotiation of space.

As we approached the commercial area, I not only noticed a lot of activity on the sidewalks, but observed all along the road people standing near the street and scanning the oncoming traffic. They were scattered all down the street and huddled together in groups. The traffic at this point was moving fairly slow because the street was crowded with vehicles. Occasionally the buseta and other surrounding vehicles were stopped at a traffic signal. This allowed large groups of pedestrians to cross the street and east west flowing traffic to pass. The buseta swerved between both lanes of the street, taking advantage of open space on the inside lane where it could speed past slower moving traffic, and veering back into the outside lane to drop off passengers and pick up new ones. Travelling down *La Deci,* the driver drops people off at various points. I notice that groups of passengers disembark at the same time, mainly because people know they can only depart when the bus reaches a natural stop. There is a sense of urgency to get off the bus at this point as people hurry to the back of the bus and exit before the traffic begins to flow again. As we approach my personal destination, I make my way to the back of the bus and press *el timbre* (the buzzer), which signals to the bus driver the need to stop. The bus, instead of making an immediate halt, stops at the next red light, when the surrounding traffic is also not moving. The bus is situated on the inside lane, so after scanning the street to make sure others cars were not moving, I jump off of the bus, weave between stopped cars and reach the safety of the sidewalk.

As opposed to picking up and dropping off passengers at formalized and predetermined stops, passengers and drivers negotiate together spatial and temporal points of exchange in and off in the city. Here the busetas and their passengers have taken on what mobility scholars refer to as nomadic strategies. Nomadism is concerned with elements that interrupt state spatializations and orderings.[48] A consideration of spatial

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[47] James Clifford. "Las culturas del viaje." *Revista de Occidente* 170.1 (1995): 45-74.

[48] David Pinder. "Nomadic Cities," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, 221-234.

practices also brings into question the potentially subversive actions of the mobile subject. It is not evidenced that the busetas subvert the state in everyday practice, however they do add to a sense of chaos and disorder in the city for using city streets and risky ways, interrupting the spatial order that formal transportation, which predetermined stops, affords.

In addition, some passengers observantly negotiate prices and ways of entering the bus, demonstrating instances of economic flexibility. A man on 24th avenues hails the bus and approaches the passenger seat window. He olds up a 1,000 peso note (about $0.52 USD) and asks the driver if that's ok, even the normal fare is 1,500 pesos (about $0.77 USD). The bus driver acknowledges him approvingly and the man quickly hurries to the back of the bus where the doors swing open. The young man hurries onto the bus and town the center aisle to slide the bill into the money slot. He then finds a seat in the front and sits. A man in tattered clothing enters the bus from 19th Street through the back and approaches the front of the bus alongside and asks the bus driver if he could take him down to Caracas Street, an upcoming major avenue about two blocks away. The bus driver acknowledges and the man slips a few coins in the slot.

Academic readings on the construction spaces of mobility string together a common thread that brings to question the need to navigate between individual experience and collective experience. They also discuss not only how different places in the city are constructed in the concrete sense but more importantly in a social way through the collection of memories and relations created between people. For example, Gandy states that urban landscapes compose a mix of collective memories intertwined with the "private realm of individual experience."[49] Augé divides his ethnologic account of the Parisian metro intro three sections, the first of which discusses memory and the second grappling with the connection between solitary and collective experience.[50] In this way my trips through the city transform from touristic guides through the city to a look at how collective experiences of moving through the city continually construct space in the social sense by creating ideas and imaginaries on how people relate to others in the city, especially by thinking about their own identities. The encountering of others on the bus, particularly those who catch the attention of the entire bus, activates collective experience on the busetas.

While sitting on the bus and conversing with another passenger on a journey through the city center, a man enters from the back of the bus and situates himself standing in the center aisle, where he turns to face the rest of the passengers on the bus. With dynamism he begins to address the

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[49] Matthew Gandy. "Landscape and Infrastructure in the Late-Modern Metropolis, " in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, 58-65.

[50] Marc Augé. *In the Metro* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

occupants of the bus. Aside from short lasting looks, the passengers seem to not pay much attention to him, looking in different directions, out the window, our continuing their conversations. However the man's voice hovers over all other noises in the bus. He talks in fluid unwavering speech for a few minutes and until the time we left the bus. He was speaking quickly and was describing his situation, referencing his family and kids and was asking for a small monetary donation. We makes small motions with his body, leaning forward to stress certain parts of his story, and varying his voice, stylistically tapering the ends of sentences in a soft intonation. His gaze remains straightforward, his right eye was brown and his left, slightly more squinted, was blue. The woman I am talking to explains to me that this isn't something that you see on the other buses, referring to the blue SITP buses and TransMilenio. I asked her if this is common and she said yes. People for the most part seemed to ignore the man, look in different directions, and continued their conversations even though the man's voice was loud and hovered over the environmental soundscape. The ambient sound of the street and the bus engine were also hovering. When we got to our stop, a lot of people filed out at once, at which point the man gave his many thanks for us having listened to his presentation.

Whereas such a scene is most likely not to be seen on TransMilenio, encounters that heighten the prevalence of socioeconomic disparities in the city are more visible on the busetas. As such, the woman's comments to me suggest the differences in expectation people have when riding different forms of public transportation on the city. Collective transportation is more associated with the possibility for non-passengers to occupy the space. However, the passengers' passive reactions to the performer suggest the everydayness of such an encounter as well as points to the ways buseta space is activated in a variety of ways by people utilizing informal means to ask for money. The ease for non-passengers to enter the bus also leads to perceptions of insecurity in collective transport. In a recent survey on the perceptions of security in the city, collective transport passengers reported that they perceive the most insecure aspect about busetas is the potential for others to jump onto the bus and rob everyone in it, which is reported to be somewhat common experience.[51] So although collective transport allows for more flexibility of use, this ultimately leads to perceptions of its insecurity.

The invariabilities of collective transport also lend itself to extensively to local knowledge. Within the first few days of arriving to Bogotá, my hosts made sure I learned how to use the city's public transportation, realizing as how this would be the primary way for me to travel the city.

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[51] *Encuesta de Percepción y Victimización.* The Bogotá Chamber of Commerce. http://www.ccb.org.co/documentos/12890_encuestapercepcion1ersemestre2013.pdf.

During accompanied trips, my guides were able to show me firsthand how to navigate the buses. This is especially necessary for the traditional collective transport, seeing as there exists very limited guides or maps of where the busetas travel. These routes are mainly known by direct experience and word of mouth. Continually while riding the buses passengers would ask the bus driver or even other bus passengers whether the bus would reach their individual destination. Helping me find a way home from the neighborhood of Chapinero, an historic and trendy neighborhood directly north of the city center, my friend Andrea assists me finding a buseta take home. This time Andrea had to step into the bus to get the driver's attention. He also didn't know. On the third attempt she stepped into the bus and again the driver didn't know, however this time at least two of the passengers on the bus heard and signaled and mouthed to us from inside the brightly lit bus that the bus I wanted was a few avenues over. Acknowledging their signals, we waved a thank you back and headed in the direction they pointed. This emphasis on local knowledge points to the ways in which experiences and memories of are crucial in the navigation of collective transportation.

Conclusion

An examination of the experiences and practices surrounding collective transportation probes deeper into the question for the city's motivations to replace traditional and private system of buses with an integrated form of mass transit in the city. Although from a planning and governmental perspective answering this question is quite clear in many aspects, the reason why I am inquiring about these motivations is because I think its answer can better explain how the city is coping with the process of urbanization as well as how the city and even country is envisioning itself in the future while it works to secure the city.

Throughout my time researching for this project, I was confronted with a plethora of technical approaches to urban transportation but found a general lack of qualitative approaches in this topic in Latin America. Nevertheless, a growing contingency of anthropologists is taking on public transportation as a lens through which to examine issues related to the city. Particularly, important work is being conducted on the informal transportation sector in Africa, which actively points to the ways in which the everyday mobile practices in informal transportation are shaped by a history of colonial urban planning.[52] However unlike many African cities at this time, many urban centers in Latin America, through a strengthening of urban governance technologies, are currently undergoing projects to modernize and formalize public transportation. In this article I worked to critically engage with this anomaly and point to the complexities of this

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[52] Meghan Elizabeth Ference. "Moving Targets: Meanings of Mobility in Metropolitan Nairobi" (2013).

process at different scales. However, as a student of anthropology, I was most interested in accounting for the ground-level experiences associated with urban transportation and now better see the potential for further research in this realm. Particularly, a continued examination of public transportation in Bogotá would benefit from a more long-term and nuanced account of the lived experiences of both the bus drivers themselves, especially those conducting the busetas, and their passengers.

Figures

Figure 1. *Buseta* on *Calle 2* in Santa Isabel neighborhood. Photo by Zachary Hernandez.

Figure 2. TransMilenio bus rapid transit. Photo by Zachary Hernandez.

Figure 3. Inside *buseta*. Photo by Zachary Hernandez.

Figure 4. SITP bus stop sign in Santa Isabel neighborhood. Photo by Zachary Hernandez.

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Daughter of the Party: Representing and Critiquing the Model Communist Citizen by Contemporary Chinese Photographer Chen Man

By DANIELLE WU

Abstract: This article focuses on a selection of works by contemporary Chinese photographer Chen Man 陈漫 (b. 1980) that were published around the 2008 Beijing Olympics, providing reflections from a time of drastic transformation of a nation that has been generally recognized as the "New China" (xinzhongguo 新中国). During this period of high international scrutiny, China constructed new ways within the quasi-pedagogical space of the fashion magazine in which to represent her own version of the ideal social citizen. A study of Chen Man's Long Live the Motherland, *a magazine spread in the October 2009 edition of* Vogue China, *reveals how Chen utilizes the female body as a site to contest historical notions of proper womanhood and female citizenship. Specifically, Chen critiques the stigma of individualized fashion as a form of political dissent, and the female consumer as the symbol of ideological failure.*

To most people across the world, Chen Man (b. 1980) is just an unconventionally young avant-garde fashion photographer from Inner Mongolia, who gets her edgy appeal from an incredible ability to "bridge Eastern and Western styles" in her richly colorful photographs of beautiful women.[1] Chen attributes her success to the youth and naiveté of China's rising commercial and design industry, recalling how her earliest photo shoots required her to multitask simultaneously as stylist, makeup artist, and photographer, tasks that would have been distributed amongst a team

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[1] "Q&A: Photographer Chen Man on China's Developing Fashion Industry, Bridging East and West." *The Cut.* Accessed February 21, 2014. http://nymag.com/thecut/2012/02/qa-photographer-chen-man.html.

of professionals in more established companies.[2] Without much local competition in the field, she was able to first garner the public's attention before completing graduate school at the Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts. She launched her career in 2005 by designing a series of front covers for Vision magazine, one of the first Shanghainese fashion and design magazines in contemporary China, and has since become widely demanded by a global network of fashion industries such as *Vogue, Elle*, Guess, and Coach. Little discussed, however, is that within a Chinese context and to a Chinese audience, her work harbors feminist critique. Given the social stigma of certain clothing as a form of self-expression within Chinese society, fashion has the potential to occupy a very politically charged position as a means of subverting authoritarian control of the individual body.

Perhaps none is more demonstrative of Chen Man's perspectives and styles than her work *Untitled (Liu Wen, San Jingya)* (2005) (fig. 1), a fashion editorial that appeared in *Harper's Bazaar China* in 2005. In this particular instance, Chen digitally manipulates the models' bodies to look like uncannily real marionettes, giving them doll-like joints and posing them to look suspended from invisible wire. The models wear silvery artificial hair, their necks surrounded by cone-shaped e-collars and their faces bearing vacant expressions. In this fusion of human and puppet, Chen questions the narrow difference between the two; especially given the context of a fashion magazine, where traditionally greater importance is placed on clothing and accessories than the bodies that wear them. Her deliberate explorations of the boundaries between allure and aversion, beauty and ugliness, fiction and reality, reveal a concern for the societal expectations and restrictions placed on

Figure 1. Chen Man, *Untitled*, 2005. ©Chen Man, courtesy of Studio6, Beijing.

[2] "China's contemporary art history is a blank slate; this causes local shots to not have a director or stylist, only a makeup artist and photographer, so everything is DIY...to the extent that the photographer has to find clothes, style makeup, and do the retouching. But this birthed many heroes, creating many local photographers, makeup artists who were multitaskers." "Chen Man: Youngest Pioneering Photographer Artist (陈漫：最年轻的前卫摄影艺术家)." *Harper's Bazaar China*, December 2011.

Figure 2. Pages from the October 2009 issue of *Vogue China* feature Chen Man's *Long Live the Motherland - Beijing 1*, 2009. ©Chen Man.

women's physical appearances. Meanwhile, her infiltration within the very industry she seeks to critique is both unorthodox and meaningful. At its most fundamental level, Chen's artwork reflects the cultural clash that has resulted from China's increasingly market-based economy and socialist value system; economic changes that have exacerbated the objectification of women's bodies as well as the political pressures of maintaining female perfection in the contemporary era.

Setting the Stage: China Under Reconstruction

This article focuses on a series of artworks by Chen Man that were published inside the pages of Vogue China's October 2009 issue that would later be titled *Long Live the Motherland* (*zuguowansui* 祖国万岁) (fig. 2). In this particular series, Chen chose to photograph Chinese model Du Juan (杜鹃) (b. 1982) with distinct Chinese national icons as backdrops, such as Tiananmen Square. These explorations of nationalism essentially utilize women's bodies as a means to reformulate the Chinese collective identity; one that scholars have often argued had been left in crisis after the massive socio-economic transformation of the country in the twentieth century.[3] This sudden value vacuum occurred specifically after the rise of new

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[3] For examples, see: Lingchei Letty Chen, *Writing Chinese Reshaping Chinese Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Rong Cai, *The Subject in Crisis in Contemporary Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

party leader Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) and the implementation of the 1979 Open Door Policy. With the introduction of "reforms and opening up" (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放)," economic reform policies increased foreign trading capabilities within China, introducing an influx of foreign goods and capitalist characteristics to an otherwise socialist economy. Deng also reportedly said, "to get rich is glorious" (*zhifu guangrong* 致富光荣), declaring market ambitions and the pursuit of wealth as politically and socially acceptable after a long era spent adamantly denouncing bourgeoisie habits. Accordingly, China rose to become an eminent global power, at the cost of discarding much of nearly a century of steadfast ideologies to combat capitalism. Its established revolutionary identity, made singular by strict control over art and image production during the Revolutionary Era (1949-1976), was cast aside when the rules set by Chairman Mao at Yan'an were reevaluated in 1982.[4]

China was in the midst of what one scholar characterizes as "vanishing nationalism," which led the central government to fear its "failing legitimacy."[5] This fragile national identity was intensified less than a decade after the Open Door Policy, in which the uneasy ending to the student demonstrations at Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 disrupted the world's confidence in China's governing ability. Moreover, the event further disrupted the unified identity of the Chinese community. In the aftermath, the central government responded by launching the "patriotic education campaign" (*aiguozhuyi jiaoyu* 爱国主义教育) in 1991, which was created to deflect domestic criticism, stabilize national uncertainty, and reestablish the importance of the Chinese Communist Party within Chinese citizens' political beliefs.[6] This campaign especially targeted China's younger generation – Chen Man's generation – from kindergarten to university level, involving the distribution of patriotic films to Beijing's primary and middle school students and the introduction of patriotic education courses in the curriculum of high schools and colleges.[7] The next step towards maintaining the integrity of the nation was to construct the Chinese collective identity in the global arena. However, the question that remained was how to represent it in a way that would alleviate the international society's hostility towards China. This was absolutely essential to repairing China's international relationships.

The opportunity for Beijing to host the 2008 Olympic Games of-

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[4] Colin MacKerras, *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

[5] Jean-Luc Domenach, "One People?" in *China's Uncertain Future* (Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2012), 109-118.

[6] Suisheng Zhao, "A State-led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in post-Tiananmen China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 3 (September 1998): 287–302.

[7] Ibid.

fered just such a chance for China to craft an official national image for the rest of the world under heavy publicity. Once Beijing was chosen as host city on July 13, 2001, it was subjected to an intense amount of international scrutiny.[8] When placing the bid, President Jiang Zemin (b. 1926) assumed the responsibility of not only refurbishing the physical infrastructure of the city, but also projecting a set of appropriate images and values that would appeal to the world and glorify China's current condition. Ultimately, this included formulating a distinct nation-state identity that would communicate the state's ability to legitimately govern in a way that would meet the approval of foreign entities.

Given this historical context, a time of both literal and figurative rebuilding and cleanup of the nation for foreign viewing pleasure, the prevalent pressures to conform to a certain standard set by foreign powers perhaps become more perceptible. Specifically, the government was responding to foreign pressures to conform to a narrative of modernization that Olympic host cities have had in the past.[9] The 1964 Tokyo Olympics, for example, exhibited Japan as "the first Asian, industrialized, capitalist, and democratic nation…As for Beijing 2008, the predominant theme anticipated by the existing narrative appears to be that of China's successful entrance into…the world system."[10] The capital city, in which Chen resided, was in the processes of rebuilding and refurbishing itself explicitly for the purpose of showing tourists and foreigners a spotless national image. In her retrospective book, Chen recalls the demolition of her old home in Beijing's Qianmen district during the time of China's fervent rebuilding.[11] Perhaps most telling of the government's desire to cater its image to this touristic gaze rather than for the benefit of its own citizens was the purging of the homeless and migrant workers that occupied the city prior to the opening ceremony (August 8, 2008). The pressure on the nation's citizens to align with the government's vision of a utopian society was palpable and ubiquitous, in ways that Chen could not have ignored as a citizen of Beijing herself.

The fashion industry was no exception to China's various modernization projects; efforts were made to advance Beijing and Shanghai into becoming fashion capitals akin to cities such as New York, Paris, and Mi-

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[8] Heidi Ostbo Haugen, "'A Very Natural Choice': The Construction of Beijing as an Olympic City During Bid Period," in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: University of Michigan Library, 2008), 145-162.

[9] Sandra Collins, "The Fragility of Asian National Identity in the Olympic Games," in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

[10] Ibid, 188.

[11] Karen Smith, *Chen Man: Works 2003-2010*, 6.

lan.[12] The development of new local magazines aligned with the nation's desire for iconicity, and accordingly, cultivating sites for displaying the nation's beautiful women as cultural assets. The renewed interest in fashion, models, and women in particular, coincided with a period of national identity crisis, which demonstrates how measurements of modernity continue to rely heavily on an evaluation of women's bodies. Working within this highly commercial market, these tensions, including the idea of international competition, are reflected in Chen's works. Amidst a national scramble for iconicity and status change, the artist takes advantage of the wealth of opportunity offered by a newly fledgling fashion industry to subvert traditional ideals of beauty and femininity, using the fashion magazine as a quasi-pedagogical space to reconstruct histories in a way that engages in social commentary.

Published just after the Beijing Olympics, *Long Live the Motherland* reveals many of the pressures placed on Beijing's citizens. In multiple depictions of model woman, from office worker chic to a beautiful manual laborer, immersed in unpolluted environments, Chen seems to depart from the realms of reality in order to depict more glamorous aspects of China. However, as Benedict Anderson theorized in his book on the illusion of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[13] Anderson stressed that any manifestations of nationalism, especially in print and image, are to be judged by the way they are created, rather than their existence within reality. In this way, depictions of nationalism can reveal the artist's perspectives and contestations.

The women provide not only examples for local women readers to aspire to, but also project a perfected national image for foreign readership, as the magazine also frequently used English text under the internationally familiar brand name of Vogue. Despite being given the assignment of visually defining acceptable representatives of China, Chen finds ways in the construction of her photographic series in which to contest several aspects of the ideal citizen embedded in the nation's history. This article specifically focuses on Chen Man's works that were released around the time of the Beijing Olympics in order to divulge how she both subverts conventional sanitized images of the nation, as commanded by the government, and yet remains completely dedicated to her cultural history in the process. Although Western scholars argue that the Olympic Games might have forced a regurgitation of historical motifs, "familiar images," and "ste-

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[12] Frédéric Godart, "Is there a fashion capital of the world? Is Paris over?" in *Unveiling Fashion: Business, Culture, and Identity in the Most Glamorous Industry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 53-63.

[13] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

reotypes about China that have accumulated over hundreds of years," these analyses greatly underestimate artists' agency in formulating a national image.[14] Chen is an example of the type of artist frequently overlooked, as a Chinese citizen who challenges select governmental policies or ideologies while explicitly celebrating a shared cultural heritage. Her presence within the academic discussion complicates the current image of China as a black-and-white nation of either political dissidents or subdued conformists.[15]

Long Live the Motherland: The Political Pressures of Female Perfection

Although in existing interviews Chen prefers to leave her associations with the terms "feminism" and "feminist" ambiguous, her work within fashion photography can be interpreted as having feminist ambitions that are unexplored. Especially in a Chinese context, in which clothing and the adornment of women's bodies has been historically used as a site of patriarchal control, the reintroduction and acceptance of fashion as socially permissible reinstates women's control over their own bodies. China has a long history of facilitating unity, and clothing trends often indicate changes in structures of power. The Nationalist government of the Republic of China (1912-49) banned women from wearing clothes, hairstyles, and cosmetics deemed as "bizarre dress" (*qizhuang yifu* 奇装衣服) during the New Culture Movement (1915-1921) with the premise that it was associated with communist spies loyal to the People's Republic of China.[16]

The ban on extravagant clothes, vivid colors, and permed hair continued into the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949), in which fashion was seen as frivolous attention to one's personal appearance with no practical use, and thus counterrevolutionary. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a codified dress code was enforced. Variations of the militant, asexual "Mao suit" were mandated to both men and women with the intent of facilitating gender balance while establishing a distinctly national dress. It also created an antithesis to the Western suit, which was deemed too bourgeois and unpatriotic. On the surface, the Chinese Communist Party welcomed "feminism" (*nuquan zhuyi* 女权主义), but only because of its potential to benefit the declining economy. This "state femi-

[14] See Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Dreams and Nightmares: History and U.S. Visions of the Beijing Games," in *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: University of Michigan Library, 2008), 163-184; and Jim Mann, *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* (New York: Viking, 2007).

[15] Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: on Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[16] Dorothy Ko and Zheng Wang, *Translating Feminisms in China: a Special Issue of Gender & History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. Ltd., 2007).

nism" can be further described as "a practice in which the state takes control of championing women's liberation, by decreasing gender difference in the media and weakening the traditional family structure in order to replace family patriarchy with new state patriarchy."[17] Feminism was predominantly used as a means to raise production quotas in allowing women into the work force, perhaps most famously advocated by Mao Zedong in his saying, "Women hold up half the sky." However, this regime, which aimed to erase gender differences, ultimately restricted women's agency while incriminating fashion as morally corrupt. Moreover, the uniform only created the illusion of gender equality. While women were liberated on the surface, they actually became doubly burdened with added expectations of being laborers and salary earners, in addition to existing expectations of motherhood and homemaking.

   After Mao's death and the introduction of the Open Door Policy in 1979, public restrictions on clothing were relaxed. However, the residual effects of the regime, which had attempted to erase its citizen's gender through clothing, still persisted, and "cultural dislocation and confusion" on the state of what exactly could be considered proper dress lasted until the mid-1980s.[18] Party officials only began wearing the Western suit in the 1990s, but still occasionally wear the Mao suit as a proud national dress. Chen's parents would have no doubt experienced the uniformed era, which renders her highly critical of the detriments of uniform, uniformity, and the theory that imposing asexuality on women will somehow garner their equality. The promotion of fashion in print media only began being cautiously introduced in the 1980s, and in the form of articles in women's magazines with titles that questioned, "Is fashion indeed good or not?" and, "Is Caring for Dress Capitalist?"[19] The ultimately pro-fashion perspectives begun by these women writers demonstrated how fashion created an avenue for reclaiming a specifically female identity in contemporary China.

   Vogue China was considered a latecomer to China's blooming fashion industry, establishing its sixteenth headquarters worldwide in Beijing on September 2005. Chen Man published a series of artworks inside the pages of *Vogue China*'s October 2009 issue that would later be titled *Long Live the Motherland*. Here, Du Juan, China's first internationally recognized supermodel, poses against distinct national icons such as Tiananmen. Her figure is emphasized by her vibrantly hued dress, which despite variations in style in different frames, remains the same shade of pure saturated red. The words "60 Memorable Fashion Moments" and the Chinese transla-

[17] Mayfair Yang, *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China, Public Worlds* v. 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 37.
[18] Wu Juanjuan, Chinese Fashion from Mao to Now (New York: Berg, 2009).
[19] Ibid.

Figure 3. Chen Man, *Long Live the Motherland - Beijing 5,* 2009.
©Chen Man, courtesy of Studio6, Beijing.

tion, "六十个经典时尚时刻" (*liushige jingdian shishang shike*), were white text overlay for the first photograph of the fashion spread, *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 1* (fig. 2), which featured Du Juan cradling peonies, a long-time national emblem of China. This semi-bilingual format of the magazine reveals how Vogue attempted to extend its local young female readership to include English-speaking communities. This article primarily focuses on the social implications of this fashion editorial. As an explicit endeavor to represent an avant-garde conception of nationhood, this series offers insight into how Chen posits feminist critique, the fate of romanticized history under the global gaze, and, lastly, the impending effects of the touristic gaze on the Chinese collective identity.

Throughout the series, the woman is the exclusive wearer of red. In *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 5* (fig. 3), for example, Du Juan stands amongst a group of men who are not only homogenously dressed, but almost exclusively in shades of blue. Red has high cultural significance in China, but can denote different meanings. At weddings and holidays, it symbolizes happiness and good fortune; but red also dominates the national flag and can symbolize communism, and therefore China. However, within the context of women and fashion, red clothing has represented

individuality in the midst of conformity.[20] Therefore, Chen's use of the color red serves multiple purposes. The color distinction between male and female, with men as the sole wearers of pants and less revealing clothing as well, emphasizes physical differences between the male and female form. Chen's deliberate decision to polarize differences in dress creates a concentration on women's biology for affirmation of femininity, and might be interpreted by some as essentialization of the female body. However, the photo series occupied a double-page spread, in which *Long Live the Motherland* provided contemporary reinterpretations of the historical photographs it was printed next to. Thus, in a comparison with historical patterns of dress, Long Live the Motherland called for a future of embracing biological gender differences, which contradicts China's historical past.

Moreover, Chen demonstrates how men and women can be unified by common ideology and love of nation without uniform appearances. Reviving motifs from the Revolutionary Era (1949-76), when China's collective identity was ideologically strong, Chen deliberately borrows from this particular period of artistic styles in order to portray a type of feminine heroic power that was supported by the Chinese Communist Party. The very title *Long Live the Motherland* (*zuguo wansui* 祖国万岁) comes from *Quotations from Chairman Mao*,[21] a mass-distributed book treated with religious importance during Mao Zedong's time as the country's leader. Specifically, Chen makes modifications to the "Iron Girl" (*tie guniang* 铁姑娘), the image of the strong woman laborer promoted during the Cultural Revolution whose suntanned face and genderless Mao suit uniform indicated her status as a member of the working class who labored in order to make her nation great.[22] Cultural Revolution posters depicting Iron Girls were produced to encourage women to work in industrial professions in response to the great need for physical laborers.

Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 3 (fig. 4) uses a similar metal architectural backdrop; Du Juan also holds the tool that (falsely) implicates her contributions to its building. However, while the woman serves as a symbol of the older days glorifying laborers and industrial workers, her quirky photo communicates feelings of absurdity. Although Chen is

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[20] Wu Juanjuan notes in *Chinese Fashion: From Mao to Now* that in 1984, two iconic films entitled *Girl in Red* (*Hongyi shaonv* 红衣少女) and *Red Dresses Are in Fashion* (*jieshang liuxing hong qunzi* 街上流行红裙子) premiered, and reflected the emerging uncertainty towards fashion within the mainstream. Both centered on female protagonists who met conflict with their peers because of their decision to wear red. *Red Dresses Are in Fashion* ultimately denounced fashion as vain, and in *Girl in Red*, her red shirt symbolized her rebellious character, who stood up to authority.

[21] Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967).

[22] Ko, *Translating Feminisms*, 70.

Figure 4. Chen Man, *Long Live the Motherland - Beijing 3,* 2009.
Courtesy of Studio6, Beijing.

best known for her Photoshop skills, she leaves this series relatively less retouched in order to highlight the irrationality of the ideal Revolutionary Era woman when reproduced in photographic form. In this way, she is able to call attention to multiple ironies within the so-called liberation of women during the Cultural Revolution. The heading describes the scene, "in those days, the figure of the worker was absolutely the most fashionable, along with the most comfortable and durable clothing that could withstand lively industrious work."[23] However, the model wears minimal clothing that serves no utilitarian value in terms of protection for the manual labor. In these paradoxical binaries, Chen comments on the contradictory expectations placed on women. The woman is simultaneously expected to be a sexualized object of visual interest and yet a productive servant. Her bare legs are covered in soot, and yet she holds a pair of spotless white gloves in her right hand. And although images of the "Iron Girl" promoted tan skin as a sign of an outdoor laborer, the model here has white skin, a sign of emerging conflict between past ideologies and present realities colliding. Despite the Iron Girl image being replaced in contemporary times by consumerist imagery, this series reveals how the contemporary ideal woman is built upon foundations laid by the Cultural Revolution. Both periods created pressures to make active contributions to the economy. How-

[23] Translated from the original text in Chinese, "在那个年代，工人的形象绝对是最时尚的，舒适耐穿的服装让辛勤工作的姿态更生动." *Harper's Bazaar China*, December 2011.

ever, women are now burdened with the added pressures of maintaining perfect appearances. Furthermore, women are imbued with the pressure to feign belonging in the elite class, projecting wealth through clothing choice regardless of realities.

In this way, Chen was able to reveal the changes she seeks in social spheres while celebrating a distinct cultural identity and gender integration. This dual role of both cultural relevance and male inclusivity, shown most prominently in *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 5* (fig. 3), is essential for the survival and acceptance of feminist ideals in China. Dorothy Ko notes that the main term for "feminism" during the Revolutionary Era, *nuquan zhuyi*, re-emerged in post-Mao China full of negative connotations, including "the stereotype of a man-hating he-woman hungry for power."[24] The term also "experienced a drastic downfall from being a valorized category translated from the modern 'West' via Japan…[and did] not appear even once in the three essays on Maoist policies."[25] In other words, the direct translation of feminism from English to Chinese has become distasteful because of its associations with anti-masculinity and attribution to foreign competitors. Chen's construction of an ideal Communist female citizen within *Vogue China* is significant in regards to Chinese feminism because it effectively creats an imaginary community in which women's empowerment through clothing and sexual liberation is not only supported by their male peers and the Chinese government, but also by the international community. As Benedict Anderson posits, these "visual and aural" representations of a nation provide citizens with confidence in other citizens' "steady anonymous, simultaneous activity," despite having no actual proof of real-time activities.[26] Without text explicitly discussing the feminist virtues of preserving choice in clothing within China's history, which faces the possibility of social stigma, Chen's images forge an empowered female identity for readers to aspire to.

Long Live the Motherland built a community in response to negative perspectives on consumerism, but most importantly against the perception that women are responsible for the rise of consumerism. Female consumerism has not only been problematized by the Chinese government and foreign media outlets, but also by artists as well. Wang Guangyi's Great Criticism series juxtaposes images from Cultural Revolution propaganda posters with Western logos such as Chanel No. 5 in *Great Criticism – Chanel* (2005) (fig. 5), in order to compare the language of corporate advertising to the persuasive techniques motivated by political agendas. This collapses the perceived difference between two icons of socialism and capitalism, stressing that they both similarly manipulate public perception. Howev-

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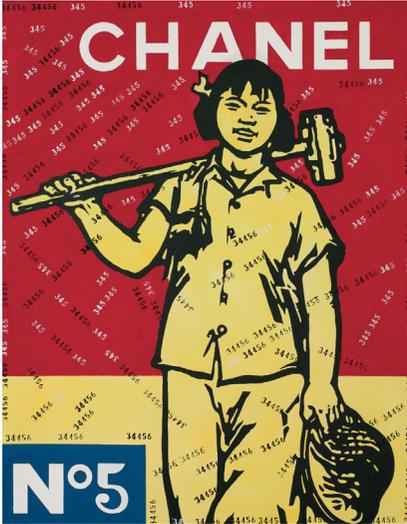[24] Ko, *Translating Feminisms*, 1.
[25] Ibid, 4.
[26] Anderson, 22, 26.

Figure 5. Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism - Chanel,* 2005. Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 47".
©Wang Guangyi.

er, Wang simultaneously implies that the coexistence of the two ideologies is contradictory, and the female worker from the Revolutionary Era has succumbed to capitalist desires. This casts doubt on the integrity of the female citizen and defines these corporate brands as the inverse of romanticized national ideals.

What this does not take into consideration, however, is that the young female consumer should be perceived as a victim of corporate marketing, which primarily targets this demographic. Megan M. Ferry suggests in her examinations of the role of China's economic transition in the process of gender-making, "contemporary Chinese female citizenship is in part defined by consumption."[27] Chen explores the difference between expectations placed on different genders in *Long Live the Motherland – Shanghai 5* (2010) (fig. 6), a continuation of the *Vogue China* themes and commission for the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.[28] A model wearing bright red lipstick and chic designer clothing poses next to a seemingly unperturbed elder man cutting another man's hair. What *Shanghai 5* ultimately represents is the shifting morals between generations in the depiction of a pretentious youth defying the Confucian tradition of respecting elders. However, Chen neither defends nor laments the destruction of these morals. Rather, she critiques the distribution of gendered stereotypes. Young women are perceived as self-absorbed and disillusioned, while the male gender is depicted as faithfully traditional and somehow immune to capitalist interests. Chen identifies how the woman is still continued to be blamed as the cause of social imbalance and the uncomfortable displacement felt by the new woman emerging in China today – the professional working woman as the contemporary replacement for the housewife and/or Iron Girl is given an abrupt, unwelcome entry into society.

Instead of highlighting the jarring disagreements between historical ideals and contemporary realities, Chen adapts the tropes of Socialist Realism to fashion photography in hopes that the valorization of wom-

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[27] Megan M. Ferry, "Advertising, Consumerism and Nostalgia for the New Woman in Contemporary China," *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 277–290.

[28] Li Jingjing, "Water for the Thirsty," *Global Times*, January 7, 2014.

Figure 6. Chen Man, *Long Live the Motherland - Shanghai 5,* 2010.
©Chen Man, courtesy of Studio6, Beijing.

en during the Cultural Revolution will live on in the collective historical memory. Socialist Realism was a highly idealized style of painting that was originally developed in Soviet Russia in order to depict political figures in the most flattering way possible. It was favorably adapted into China during the Cultural Revolution because it served the requirements set by Mao Zedong at the Forum on Literature and Art in Yan'an, Shaanxi province in 1942, for art to serve the working class and advance socialist ideologies.[29] Like the protagonists in Socialist Realist art, Chen places models on elevated horizon lines in order to greater exaggerate their heroic acts and monumental significance to society. In *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 1* (fig. 2), Du Juan's cheeks are even distinctly reddened with *yanzhi* (胭脂), a shade of red-pink blush that symbolizes youth and vitality. This was a significant part of standards for art promoted by Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong's wife, to depict people "flushed, light, and bright" (*hong, guang, liang* 红光亮).[30]

The limited color palettes of deeply saturated primary colors such as red and blue evoke wartime posters produced from woodblocks, featuring large figures of workers and an expanse of negative space dedicated to overt political slogans. When the attributes of woodblock are reproduced

[29] Mao Zedong, *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967).
[30] Melissa Chiu and Sheng Tian Zheng, *Art and China's Revolution* (New York: Asia Society; in association with Yale University Press, 2008), 6.

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with photographic realism, the oddities of idealistic depiction become more apparent. Chen translates the visuals of woodblock print, which existed due to the limitations of the fragile and rigid medium, into fashion photography. In *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 3* (fig. 4), The stiff nature of the woman's pose, which is simultaneously static and dynamic, is greatly exaggerated. Like the woodblock print, the figure is depicted from below, as well as with exaggeratedly broad shoulders achieved with shoulder inserts, in order to represent the monumentality of the human potential.

Dressing models in feminine cuts, tightened waistlines, and shorter hemlines, Chen somewhat softens the militancy of original Socialist Realist styles, but also to reclaim gender distinctions in clothing as an important change in women's rights since the Revolutionary Era. This nostalgia for an idealized past embodies a utopian vision of modernity that allows for embracing gendered differences. In this way, it aligns very much with the ideologies of third-wave, Lipstick Feminism in its reclamations of sexual behavior previously interpreted by patriarchal systems to denote moral depravity, particularly female adornment such as cosmetics and high-heels.[31] These themes also parallel the second term for feminism in China, *nvxing zhuyi* (女性主义); a far less threatening term that calls for reinforcing gender distinctions and promoting femininity. However, it is at times met with the same ambivalence as *nvquan zhuyi*, and sometimes not considered a type of feminism in the Anglophone world.[32] Long Live the Motherland's depictions of a lone woman, whose sense of individuality is almost wholly dependent on the color of her dress and its feminine silhouette, defines the Chinese feminine consciousness as the desire to be feminine and desirable. This challenges the social and cultural boundaries of contemporary China; namely, the fear of female sexuality that informs gender politics, and, ultimately, the historical subjugation of women's rights to national interests. Perhaps the most transgressive aspect of this series is its unapologetic self-awareness of its historical incorrectness. Long Live the Motherland places women's bodies directly in front of symbols of the old leading male order that decided the difference between decency and indecency, in an act of subtle defiance. A curvaceous model in provocative clothing accompanied by a milieu of men in an otherwise abandoned alleyway (*Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 5*, fig. 3) would have been scandalous just a few decades ago. The woman wearing bright red nail polish and bangles in front of Mao Zedong's portrait at Tiananmen (*Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 1*, fig. 2) would have been declared bourgeois; indeed, the woman dominates

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[31] Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley, *Feminism in Popular Culture* (New York: Berg, 2006), 84. Also see: Linda M. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[32] Ko, *Translating Feminisms*.

Figure 7. Ai Weiwei, *June 1994*, 1994. Black-and-white print, 47.6x61". ©Ai Weiwei

the picture plane, rendering the national landmark small and nondescript in the distance. The historical inaccuracy is precisely how it makes a quiet homage to the accomplishments of women, having destroyed patriarchal control of women's bodies in the past.

As a comparison, one might take a look Ai Weiwei's composition-ally similar *June 1994* (1994) (fig. 7), in which Ai Weiwei's wife, Liu Qing, provocatively lifts her skirt up to the camera in front of Tiananmen Square in a spiteful gesture of social defiance. This public display of unabashed female deviancy, with Mao's portrait and on-duty official guards in the background, is one of the ultimate forms of political dissenting because it rejects the government's control of the citizen's body. Though far less directly insulting, Chen Man nonetheless attempted to restore fashion as a site for women's agency that aims to contest its historical connotations with narcissism and vanity. Although fashion advocates in the mass media helped transform Chinese fashion from "a vain and petty lifestyle issue into a legitimate industry," it has not yet successfully dispelled all social stigma associated with female vanity.[33]

Appearing alongside Chen's contemporary photos were historical pictures of "The East is Red," the famous communist play, and Lei Feng studying. These romanticizations of an idealized past place women in rela-tion to large-scale social processes. In *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 5* (fig. 3), the model wears the same iconic hat donned by Lei Feng, an iconic

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[33] Wu Juanjuan, n.p.

hero of the Communist Revolution, hailed for his selfless acts of bravery. His model citizenry appeared in school textbooks and propaganda posters depicting him darning socks or serving tea to officers.[34] He was often depicted with variations of the same military soldier's hat, with distinct ear flaps that attached to the top and lined with sheepskin, which was first designed to keep farmers and common workers warm in Northern China, near his hometown. After the Cultural Revolution, there were rumors that such a person did not even exist, that he was the creation of the Communist Party as a part of a nation-wide campaign to instill national spirit. Despite this controversy, Chen celebrates Lei Feng's identity as an icon of China and the Communist spirit, using his well-established and highly recognizable image as a means of woman's empowerment. This juxtaposition of model citizen and clothing model justifies concepts previously criticized as foreign and harmful – high fashion, a consumerist ethic, female empowerment – with a sense of tradition and cultural familiarity, relaxing their perceived threat to the stability of traditional norms. In other words, Chen's fusion of indisputably model citizenry within the nation's history with contemporary women's fashion is an attempt to reclaim women's fashion as politically synonymous with ideal social citizenship in the current era. Chen thus creates an alternative importance for women's fashion, in serving a broader purpose of nationhood and national image-making. More importantly, this reclamation of women's fashion as one that serves nationalistic purpose imbues feminism – a term that carries the stigma of anti-masculinity and xenophobia – with a feeling of cultural relevance.

Delivering Chinese Culture: The Commodification of Nationalism

  Long Live the Motherland exemplifies how China's national identity is packaged and sold in contemporary times, which raises the concern that it may sanitize and glorify present realities. In many ways, *Long Live the Motherland* reflects the multiple influences that caused this glamorization of China's historical past. The choice in backdrops, for example, reflects many of the shifts in the tourism industry that Chen witnessed during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. For example, she interestingly excludes the Great Wall as an indispensible national symbol. Instead, as illustrated by *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 5*, Chen choses to photograph Du Juan in a Beijing *hutong* (胡同), narrow alleyways between traditional Chinese architecture that faced rampant demolition during pre-Olympic preparations. After many were razed, a small selection was preserved near

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[34] For an extensive biography on Lei Feng and his iconicity, see Kuang-sheng Ch'en, *Lei Feng, Chairman Mao's Good Fighter* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1968) and James A. Schnell, "Lei Feng: Government Subsidized Role Model," in *Perspectives on Communication in the People's Republic of China* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999).

the center of Beijing and became a large tourist hub. Thus, the selectivity of locations for Long Live the Motherland indicate the increasing dependence on market forces, tourism, and the elite global audience, for deeming locations as culturally significant.

In *Long Live the Motherland – Beijing 3*, Du Juan poses against 798, a cluster of German manufacturing factories that were abandoned on the eve of the Cultural Revolution; the signs of their abandonment are emphasized by large rust stains and a desolate landscape. Facing closure in 2005, the area was saved from government mandated demolition because of the realization that it could be incredibly lucrative.[35] The Chinese government took control of the area, turning it into a tourist destination complete with commercial galleries, cafes, and shopping areas. The gentrification of 798, in which rent prices have increased during its commercial success, has ironically driven out many of the original artist communities that had fought for its preservation. Despite the internal forces that keep the management of places such as 798 highly manicured and tightly controlled, the dilapidated look of the area projects cultural authenticity, humble origins, and masks its capitalization.

Artists such as Wang Guangyi in his *Great Criticism series* show concern for this gradual subsuming of the Chinese moral landscape by capitalist inclinations. Indeed, Chen's ability to form a legible nation-state identity proves to be extremely lucrative particularly for globalized industries such as Vogue. The fact that cultural and national specificity has become a welcomed precious commodity in the global market is problematic in its own right. Sara Chaeng theorizes that the popularization of Chinese goods within the consumer industry has a history of reproducing imperialist habits and orientalist themes.[36] Spaces such as the department store and commercial magazine provided a secure an alternative imperial space for examining the loot obtained from world travel. Knowledge about Chinese historical references, their origins and backgrounds, became a means for Western readers to accumulate cultural capital and exhibit it as symbols of an ordered empire. Meanwhile, it also restricted the Chinese identity to a feminine sphere.

However, *Long Live the Motherland* offers perhaps a more nuanced perspective on the use of the magazine and commercial space as a means for world exposition and mass distribution. Perhaps most ironic about *Long Live the Motherland* is that China's national identity is literally constructed using Western brands – everything from the jewelry to shoes are listed as originating from luxury powerhouses such as Chanel, Versace, Giorgio Ar-

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35 Lucius C. Kuert, *Project 798: New Art in New China* (San Francisco: Microcinema International, 2010).
36 Sarah Cheang, "Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store," *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 1 (n.d.).

mani, Longchamp, Dior, Hermes, and Marc Jacobs, their prices also listed at upwards of ¥40,000 (at that time equivalent to about $6600 USD). The coexistence of luxuries previously deemed as "bourgeois" and references to Revolutionary China seem at first contradictory. However, these luxury commodities displayed on women's bodies serve not only the purpose of boasting a modernized country with changing social conditions, but also high class mobility, and the purchasing power of the growing Chinese elite. They also serve to assert the persistence and permeation of Chinese culture through Western frameworks, reversing the old imperial power structures that were very much the target of the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution.

For example, In *Long Live the Motherland - Beijing 5* (fig. 3), a female figure representing a Lei Feng incarnate poses next to men who are uniformly dressed in Navy Breton stripes, a nineteenth-century garment produced for men in the French navy. This iconic shirt, now synonymous with haute-bourgeois Parisian chic, because of efforts by couture designers Coco Chanel and Jean Paul Gaultier, is paired with standard issue, black rubber rain boots. However, the men ride rusty, worn bicycles – this combination of visual cues projects the identity of a middle- to lower-class urbanite despite their high-end clothing. This coalescence of Chinese ideologies and luxury goods deliberately subverts the idea that consumer ideologies oppose national ideologies. With this image, therefore, Chen Man manages to retain the Revolutionary worker's ethic and collective thinking held significant to the Chinese identity, aspects of which some, such as Wang Guangyi, have communicated to be in danger of extinction amidst increasing affluence and economic prosperity.

As a whole, Long Live the Motherland challenged the seeming contradictions between today's fast-paced commercial culture within China, creating a means in which self-indulgent individualism and the "culture of the masses" (*qunzhong wenyi* 群众文艺), a legacy of the revolutionary past, can coexist. This series demonstrats how Chen could be seen as occupying a feminist perspective, because she supports the importance of women's fashion and allows women more agency. The series also rewired existing imperialist power structures within the fashion industry, asserting the continued solidarity of traditions from China's revolutionary past.

Ethnic Requirements for the Ideal Citizen

Within this condensed sartorial timeline, it is impossible to ignore that the selectivity of what composes the ideal citizen reveals a multitude of exclusionary principles. Despite productive conversations surrounding gender, racial and ethnic conflicts are often cast to the wayside. Although Chen is a native to Inner Mongolia herself and cited frequently in Chinese media as "slightly dark-skinned," Long Live the Motherland excludes any

hint of China's fifty-six minorities in its depiction of Han bourgeoisie.[37] Although the series features multiple different models, the models chosen for this particular photographic series purposely lack the biological diversity of her other works, such as the *Rise and Shine* (2012) series. The latter used a more ethnographic approach in representing China – with global access to a foreign audience, this series revealed the severe differences between the acceptable world-view of China and the local audience's self image. In an interview with the artist, Chen recognized that biological diversity is something that sells to a Western market, but heavily denied any intention to impose diversity onto a local market.[38]

The creation of an idealized image of citizenship to aspire to and admire carries residual sentiments from the Ethnic Classification Project (*minzu shibie* 民族识别) in the 1950s. This government-implemented identification system divided China's population into fifty-five ethnic minorities that lay outside of the Han majority, who make up ninety-two percent of China's population. This ambitious undertaking proved to be an exhaustive and confusing process, in which linguists often misinterpreted the said peoples' self-identification, ignored ethnic minorities with insubstantial population numbers, and sometimes relied on dialect to separate people into categories, or "plausible communities."[39] One of the aims of this "civilizing project" specifically defined women's physical appearance as an obstacle to overcome in the march toward socialist modernity.[40] One can see that, in crafting a monolithic notion of womanhood and national identity, Chen also abides by an underlying Han elitism, separating ethnic minorities and darker skinned women from perceptions of the civilized world.

Ultimately, Chen's transition from her very first series as a professional artist, *Vision* (2003-2005), to current works reveals the effects of the prevailing pressures of the advertisement industry and mainstream commercial market. Her covers for *Vision Magazine*, which featured a different woman given unconventional, supernatural features using Photoshop, was heavily criticized by local audiences as ugly.[41] Compared to *Vision*, *Long Live the Motherland* reveals a drastic restriction on digital manipulation,

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[37] *Harper's Bazaar China*, December 2011.

[38] Chen Man. Interview by Danielle Wu at Studio 6, Beijing, June 11, 2013.

[39] Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[40] Sara L. Friedman, "Embodying Civility: Civilizing Processes and Symbolic Citizenship in Southeastern China." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 3 (August 2004): 687–718.

[41] Lesa Hannah, "Culture Shock: Photographer Chen Man's Boundary-pushing Imagery Make Their Way into a M.A.C Collaboration," *FashionMagazine*, February 23, 2012. http://www.fashionmagazine.com/blogs/beauty/2012/02/23/fashion-photographer-chen-man-m-a-c/.

opting instead for more naturalistic women to be more receptive. Perhaps to make a more impressionable monolithic image for China, an essential list of characteristics of the ideal woman was compiled. Chen admits, "[when] I got into fashion, people were concerned about my works, afraid of too much post-production that turns into portraits of fair[ies] and demons. Then I jumped to a minimalist stage, without any transition…that lead to my status [as a] mainstream fashion photographer."[42]

Indeed, her later works reveal the strains of achieving popularity at a local level. In 2008, Chen significantly subdued her use of digital manipulation for *Long Live the Motherland* opting instead for more naturalistic women. Pale-skinned, upper class, and poised, her depictions aligned with preexisting notions of ideal citizenry and womanhood. The preferred woman to represent China continues to be pale-skinned, exacerbating a long-established racial and ethnic hierarchy. However, this singular notion of an "ordinary" citizen who understands proper womanhood reinforces the power of the nation responsible for its creation.[43] Amidst forging a common historical memory for the new post-Reform generation, the singular model provides a stable performance of cultural identity.

Conclusions: China's New Woman

In this study of Chen Man's fashion editorial published in *Vogue China, Long Live the Motherland*, it is clear that Chen took advantage of the concept of the woman's body as a national and economic asset. In this series, Chen utilized the fashion model as a site for representing the nation while simultaneously delving into gender politics. Within the photo spread, Chen navigated her perspectives on women's empowerment through the mechanics of avant-garde fashion, a concept that pictures of women could and should test the limits of the socially acceptable. Her modifications to preconceived notions of the ideal female citizen reveal the changes she seeks in social spheres while celebrating a distinct cultural identity. In this way, Chen's work can be seen not necessarily as a bridge between cultures, but instead as a contemporary criticism of the idealized woman in China.

In this case, Chen challenged the historical preconceived notion that women's fashion was motivated by self-interest and could not serve as a positive political force. Although some would argue that the magazine as

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[42] "Chen Man Q&A," *Chinese Arts Centre*, April 23, 2012, http://blog.chinese-arts-centre.org/exhibitions/chen-man-qa/.

[43] "Power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated power" (1992, 174)… female sexuality becomes a privileged site not of restraint and repression but of the banal – the construction of ordinary citizens capable of bearing the knowledge of women's sexuality." Kaplan, Caren, and Minoo Moallem, *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

a commercial space and corporate entity would conflict with the original rules of the ideal Chinese Communist citizen, Chen preserved clothing as an integral part of China's cultural history. In *Long Live the Motherland*, fashion is conceived as a route to women's self-sufficiency and strength, which would in turn benefit the nation economically. Chen's eroticized models are a deliberate feminist reaction to the asexual "Iron Girl" ethos of the Mao era, which discouraged attention to the female form.[44] Her motives can be interpreted as feminist because they transform preexisting patriarchal social relations and redefine sexual culture – namely, what is determined to be acceptable clothing and acceptable public behavior.

Within less than a decade since the start of her career, Chen Man has produced an enormous number of works, unmatched by someone her age. Within this oeuvre, the artist has learned to construct an aesthetic form that encompasses accurate nationhood. Nonetheless, she continues to find ways within a youthful industry to divulge a host of cultural and gender hierarchies formed within the country's pursuit of a prominent global status. In her portrayals of the role that modernity has in shaping the lives of women, the fashion industry proves to provide a newfound freedom on which to exercise the definition of women's empowerment, often without the pressure of patriarchal authorship and readership. For example, it provides a potential site on which to make visible the bodies of women that are feared or face stigma within China: the foreign body, the naked body, and the hypersexualized. This case study demonstrates how Chen subverted ideas of a monolithic nation identity in favor of a favorable collective identity for Chinese women.

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[44] Kay Schaffer and Song Xianlin, "Unruly Spaces: Gender, Women's Writing and Indigenous Feminism in China," *Journal of Gender Studies* 16, no. 1 (March 2007): 28.

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author biographies

Vinita Chaudhry is a double major in women, gender, and sexuality studies (WGSS) and anthropology. With outside experience in queer activism and community building, Vinita is interested in traversing the gap between scholarship and activism, particularly in regards to queer communities of color. Vinita will be continuing on to a PhD Program in Anthropology at Northwestern University, with hopes to expand current research interests in queer diasporic communities, specifically through research on transnational queer sexuality and international political economies of queer activism and organizing. Vinita would like to thank Professor Shefali Chandra for serving as an incredibly encouraging Mellon Mays and senior honors thesis mentor, the WGSS program for serving as an academic home for the past four years, and friends and family for their undying love and support.

Davida Farhat is from Baltimore, MD majoring in Anthropology with minors in Public Health and Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies. As the daughter of Liberian immigrants, Davida appreciated that through her Mellon project, she gained insight into the nuances of the refugee experience. She is grateful to those who were willing to share their stories. After graduation, Davida will be pursing a Master of Public Health degree in Sociomedical Sciences from Columbia University. She hopes to later obtain her Ph.D. in Anthropology and continue conducting research that explores public health issues using anthropology's methods and its focus on culture. Davida would like to thank her family and friends for their love, her mentors, Dr. Shanti Parikh and Dr. Stephanie McClure, for their support and encouragement, as well as the current Mellon fellows and Mellon alumni for teaching her how to be a scholar and ally.

Zach Hernandez is a major in Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis. Inspired by much of the insights gained from his Mellon project, Zach is pursuing work in urban policy and planning with a focus in public transportation. After experience working in this field, he then plans to apply to a graduate studies program in urban anthropology. He would like to greatly thank Dr. Bret Gustafson, faculty member in the Anthropology Department, for his mentorship and support during this research project.
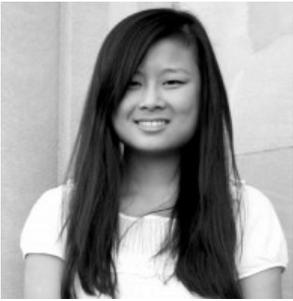
Danielle Wu majors in art history and archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis, with minors in Chinese and studio arts. Her broader research interests include exploring the concept of cosmopolitan feminism and the tenebrous divide between high and low art in the contemporary era. Danielle plans to pursue a PhD in art history. She would like to thank Professors Lingchei Letty Chen, Kristina Kleutghen, and Ila Sheren for their support and guidance throughout this research project. Special thanks to Studio6, Ai Weiwei, and Sotheby's for generously providing artwork images, and Chen Man for allowing publication of an exclusive interview.

A note from the artist

A keen observer might correctly guess that I was inspired by the Italian street artist, Blu, and his *Sao Paulo* (2007). His depicts the Christ of Sao Paulo in cartoonish black outline, becoming subsumed and submerged by guns and other weapons in a somber, poignant representation of micro-violence in South America. I realized that, although any human being may encounter these times of adversity and turbulence, disconnect and dissatisfaction with societal ills, there is always some beacon of hope that keeps us committed to our work in the immediate world. For Blu, this hinged upon religion; and in many ways, academia can be observed as a form of religion. We trust that it will help us better the world, grant us a sense of purpose in the world, and instill in us virtues worthy of spreading to others. In studying what appears to be a cyclical trail of racial, economic, and gender inequalities, as well as the human component allowing them to thrive, knowledge is what emerges as an emblem of promise. Knowledge, uncensored and unfettered, holds the promise of a better tomorrow.

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THE
INQUIRY

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