

Erasmus School of  
History, Culture and  
Communication

# History Collective

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OF HISTORY STUDIES**

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*History Collective aims to contribute to contemporary issues by offering the renowned 'Rotterdam perspective': edgy, progressive, diverse and unique. Our interest is a progressive approach to historical discourse, including multidisciplinary research to promote new perspectives and approaches to history, and uncovering the voices of those who have been pushed out of traditional narratives. We hope to ventilate creativity from students that connects history with societal challenges, highlighting the relevance of historical reflection in exploring solutions to them.*

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# Editorial

## Dear readers,

We are thrilled to present the first issue of *History Collective*, a student-led history journal which has been in the making since November 2021. We are a group of history students based in Erasmus University Rotterdam who are determined to create an inclusive academic platform that encourages our peers to write, research, and publish their ideas.

Above all, *History Collective* is a journal *for* students and history enthusiasts *by* students, and this has informed our approach throughout. The featured student articles are ethically peer-reviewed by us, the student editorial board, while our advisory board, occupied by staff members of the EUR history department, guided us to ensure the quality of the publication.

Our aim is to reach out to students who are passionate about making an impact and are driven to undertake current societal challenges. We are thereby committed to making this platform a safe space for marginalized students by promoting progressive research that counters racism, misogyny and classism within academia. We further seek to lower the barrier to publication with accessible language and an open-access format that encourages people from all walks of life who share our passion for history to engage. Already from our first issue, we are truly delighted by the diversity of research interests and creativity of our peers, and thus, inspired to continue with this mission.

In *Depicting Palestine*, Maartje de Koeijer explores how the Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant has reported on Palestine since 1948. The article provides a historical overview of the Catholic origins of De Volkskrant, analyzing four articles from 1948 and 2002, and analyzes the extent to which their religious origins impacted their reporting.

In *Honey, It's Just Camp*, Melanie Lim explores the origins, evolution, and modern interpretations of camp, which, in essence, is the love of the unnatural-artifice and of exaggeration. In this article, the relation between hegemonic culture and camp is analyzed through the lens of gender, sexuality, and queerness.

Chile's socialist movements, from the 1960s until the 2010s, are inextricably linked to political music. This is what the author Sebastian Kuthe Fuentes explores in *"The People and Time Will Tell If I Am An Artist": Music As a Way of Political Action in Chile Since the 1960s*. He weaves together the origins of political music movements such as the New Chilean Song with its effects for Chileans, both those living under Pinochet's right-wing military dictatorship and those in exile abroad.

In *'Hot as Hell: The Cold War's Impact on Nation-Building in Former Indochina'*, Elina Ziehm examines the nation-building process in the newly independent states of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Her interpretation brings together different facets of this process – military intervention, economic aid, interference into political affairs and ideological influence, and the role of art in identity-formation.

In *We Forgot How to Future: The Neoliberal Destruction of Great Works* W.E. Dung argues that the neoliberal state's total subordination to the self-regulating market has resulted in the destruction of Great Works, both in mind and in practice. Dung cites China's extensive Great Works projects as proof that Great Works can still be carried out in the twenty-first century. It is argued that replacing hypernormalized neoliberalism with another system and embarking on a vision quest for new futures can enable Great Works and address global environmental crises.

To inaugurate our first issue, we have also asked our Advisory Board members to share a number of personal vision pieces. They are an opportunity for the board members to reflect on their vision for historical research and university education at the History Department of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Prof. Dr. Alex van Stipriaan presents his understanding of the values and visions of the Erasmus History Department, as does Dr. Daniel Curtis. Both evaluate the current position of the History Department at Erasmus University Rotterdam, highlighting the department's emphasis on inter- and transnational perspectives.

Dr. Lara Green recounts her personal experience as a student and teacher to demonstrate how studying history may help people understand their role in the world, and thereby enrich historical studies with new interpretations. She also examines the difficulties that the humanities face in today's higher education landscape.

Dr. Yuri van Hoef shares his perspectives about history education at Erasmus University. He focuses on the value of learning history and advises students to be open to diverse ideas when studying history. Dr. Maarten van Dijck discussed the EUR history program's unique approach to historical study, which is distinguished by a global and diachronic perspective that employs social science theories and methodologies.

In creating this journal, we have faced many challenges, from finding a title that truly represented us to navigating the bureaucratic processes of getting permissions. Creating a journal from scratch has not been an easy task to undertake. However, we were determined to make this idea a reality and we are proud to present to our readers what we have been working on for the past year. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to the Department of History and our professors, whose guidance and support throughout the process have been invaluable. In particular, we would like to express our appreciation for *Dr. Yuri van Hoef*, who has mentored us every step along the way. We would like to thank the Advisory Board members *Dr. Daniel Curtis*, *Dr. Maarten F. van Dijck*, *Prof. Dr. Dick Douwes*, *Dr. Jeroen Euwe*, *Dr. Lara Green*, *Professor Dr. Maria Grever*, *Dr. Iwona Gusc*, *Dr. Pieter van den Heede*, *Prof. Dr. Paul van de Laar*, *Prof. Dr. Alex van Stipriaan Luiscius*, *Professor Dr. Gijsbert Oonk*, *Prof. Dr. Kees Ribbens*, *Dr. Tina van der Vlies* and *Prof. Dr. Ben Wubs*. We would also like to thank the ESHCC Web Team for their contribution – especially *Marloes van Hooijdonk*, who has spent hours designing the issue and perfecting the layout. Lastly, we would like to thank the authors of our first issue, whose contributions have made *History Collective* possible.

We are delighted to present the first edition of *History Collective*. It has been a labor of love, and we are proud to share the work of our esteemed authors with our readers. We hope that this edition will serve as a valuable resource for those interested in the study of history, and that it will inspire further research, discussion, and exploration. We look forward to receiving more thought-provoking pieces to share with our readers in the years to come. Thank you for your support and we hope you enjoy this edition.

Best,

*Janset Nil Genç, Rachnaa van Hunen, Sophie Marijn, Yukiko Sonntag, Janne Heymeijer, and Yueming Wang*

Editors and Co-Founders of *History Collective*

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# Depicting Palestine

The Religious Nature of De Volkskrant  
and Its Influence On Their Reporting On  
Palestine In 1948 and 2002

*By Maartje De Koeijer*

## Introduction

It is 15 May 1948, and in the Mandate Palestine, the Nakba starts. Just the day before, the State of Israel declared its independence, and the fifteenth day of the month marked the beginning of the ethnic cleansing and mass refugee movement of the Palestinians from their homes.<sup>1</sup> The events that follow each other are reported all over the world, including the Netherlands. Left with the remnants of a harsh war of their own, and amidst trying to get back on their feet, Dutch media had to prioritise what was newsworthy and how they could spend their resources wisely. Dutch society was pillared into four distinct groups, and all of them had their own media to turn to; catholic, protestant, socialist, and liberal.<sup>2</sup> One of the big catholic newspapers was *De Volkskrant*, aimed at the working class within its particular pillar. Having a Catholic background meant reporting from a set perspective. This perspective influences the framework from which news is written. When it is applied to international conflict, it brings forth interesting analyses and constructions of those conflicts. Though facts are indisputable, certain religious and historical backgrounds of news outlets can influence their audience. Religious history of media is the overarching topic of this paper. To be more specific, an analysis will occur to see whether the catholic nature of *De Volkskrant* influenced their reporting on Palestine during the Nakba in 1948, whether this has changed with their switch to leave their catholic roots behind, and if this change was visible during their reporting on the second Intifada in 2002. A question like that must be split up into smaller parts.

Analyses of how the Palestine-Israel conflict has been portrayed in media have been done before, with a notable contribution from Nadia R. Sihan on British newspapers and their reporting.<sup>3</sup> However, there has not been a specific academic focus on the Dutch media landscape, let alone a singular newspaper. Another dimension that has not been explored yet is how Catholicism, media, and international conflict come together when discussing Palestine in Dutch newspapers.

First, the position of the Roman Catholic Church and the Dutch strand of the Catholic Church will be looked at to provide a general understanding of the Roman Catholic perspective, though the Dutch Catholic Church might have its subtle deviations from that of the Vatican. After that, to gain more understanding, a brief historic overview of *De Volkskrant* will be presented, specifying their place within the Dutch media landscape and how this position, and their catholic roots, aid towards their stance on reporting on Palestine. Additionally, four newspapers articles of *De Volkskrant* will be comparatively analysed, two from 1948 and two from 2002, to see whether this can provide an insight into the research question at hand. After the media analysis, a concluding answer will be provided. This paper does not aim to present a judgment on the Israel-Palestine conflict, it is meant to analyse whether having a religious background influences reporting on international conflict by doing a case study on the depiction of Palestine in *De Volkskrant*, a Dutch former Catholic newspaper.

## The Catholic Church and Palestine

Jerusalem and the surrounding land form a geographic place that harbours histories of the three major monotheistic religions, and it is therefore one of the most important cities for many Muslim, Christian, and Jewish people. No wonder, then, that this significance is also the cause for dispute. Palestine is no stranger to being occupied, either. From the Ottoman Empire, to British imperial control over the territory, followed by interference of the United Nations and then illegal settlements of Zionist settler colonists, non-occupation is far away.<sup>4</sup> Current conceptions of the present-day conflict that befalls this historic land tend to view it in a binary perspective; the Muslim Palestinians versus the Jewish Israelis. This conception is factually wrong, since the Palestinian people are diverse, with a big part of them being Christian, Jewish, and affiliated with other religions. Nor are all Israelis Jewish, and simplifying the Palestine-Israel conflict to a matter of religion prevents people to take into account the multifaced nature of general conflict. Just as how, for example, the French Revolution cannot solely be attributed to economic hardship, the Palestine-Israel conflict cannot be viewed from a purely religious lens. However, when it comes to the Holy Land, it is indisputable that religion plays an important part.

Within the Palestine-Israel conflict, the Catholic Church takes a special position. As the scope of this paper starts at the Nakba in 1948, it will not dive deep into the full history of the Catholic Church and its presence in the Holy Land, but it will provide a large overview of the most important

moments. As outlined by Anthony O'Mahony, papal policy regarding Jerusalem as the Holy City of all three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity) can be divided into three main phases.<sup>5</sup> From 1897 until 1947 there was an emphasis on the physical integrity of the Holy Places, with needs of the local catholic community at the centre. From 1947 until 1964, the Vatican stressed the safeguarding of the Holy Places, with statements to freedom of access to religion and the right to have control over one's Holy Places. Finally, from 1964 until now, there has been a focus on Jerusalem in a global context, with eyes on the preservation of its identity and vocation with again the call for freedom of religion, though this time placed more in a cultural context.

Up until mid-1948, the Vatican held up a neutral position towards the political division of Palestine. This changed after the State of Israel called out their independence, an act that was followed by the Nakba; the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian families from their homes. The Nakba caused many Palestinian people to flee their homeland, and in this light the Vatican brought forward a relief effort for all refugees.<sup>6</sup> For the Catholic Church, the Nakba also raised the question of Jerusalem's future status. Before the Nakba, the Vatican had been content with British rule in the Mandate, but with the imperial forces gone, it brought new danger to their main project of safeguarding catholic interests in the Holy Land. British rule in Palestine and parts of the Holy Land meant maintaining the status quo of earlier times.

On the one hand, the Vatican choosing to remain neutral within the Palestine-Israel

conflict could be seen as just that: staying neutral in order to protect one's own property and community. However, on the other side there is a different narrative that portrays the situation as well. It is no secret, as Peter Marendy states, that the relationship between (mainly European) Christianity and Judaism knows its sides of distrust and anger.<sup>7</sup> For a long time, Jewish people were looked at in dislike, because of the Christian belief that it was because of the Jews that their founder, Jesus Christ, died almost two thousand years ago. It is not illogical for a link to be made between historic levels of distrust and reluctance to choose a side, or in Israel's case - recognise a new state. Nostra Aetate, a declaration from the Vatican from 1965 on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, helped amending the relationship between the Catholic Church and the people of Israel. The declaration was dedicated to condemning antisemitism and stated that Jewish people cannot be held accountable for the death of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Combining these two perspectives on the previous neutrality of the Catholic Church on the conflict in Palestine, it becomes clear that the Vatican took great consideration in its stance. Due to their historically strenuous relation with Jewish people, British rule within the Palestinian Mandate was preferred, and when the British removed themselves from the territory, the Catholic Church favoured Arab leadership over Jewish leadership. This was not only because of millennia of so called "distrust", but also because local Christian communities were more familiar with Arab, non-Christian leadership rather than - mainly European - newcomers. Because Jerusalem as the Holy City, and the surrounding areas

as the Holy Land hold much places of significant value for the Catholic Church, a great motivator for the Vatican to remain neutral within conflict was to protect their Holy Places, and subsequently, their real estate within these geographical borders. Neutrality policy stopped after the Nakba of 1948, and the Vatican remained reluctant towards Israel. This reluctance included not recognising the state of Israel until 1993, long after the publication of Nostra Aetate.<sup>9</sup> Though, around the time that Nostra Aetate was published, the Vatican actively pushed for a different policy regarding the Holy City Jerusalem, one of internationalisation. There is an emphasis on preserving identity and vocation, making Jerusalem a global cultural city. Even with pressure from both sides on the Catholic Church, the main purpose of their careful navigation within the Palestine-Israel conflict remains the protection of their local communities within the Holy Land (covering areas in Palestine as well as in Israel), and safekeeping of the property of their Holy Places.

The position of the Catholic Church as an institution within the conflict has been presented and provides a needed backdrop for the rest. With a major institution like the Catholic Church, there are local divisions of it that might differ from opinion, or perhaps that do not agree at all with the decisions of the Vatican. Dutch society used to be defined by pillarisation, meaning that there



**"THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S NAVIGATION WITHIN THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT REMAINS THE PROTECTION OF THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE HOLY LAND , AND SAFEKEEPING OF THE PROPERTY OF THEIR HOLY PLACES."**

were four main “pillars” that defined life: Protestant, Catholic, liberal, and socialist.<sup>10</sup> Belonging to a pillar meant that one would go to school, sports clubs, entertain oneself, marry, and work within it. Social contact between the different pillars was limited, and only on political level did the pillars truly engage with each other. The Roman Catholic Church formed the main authority within the Catholic pillar, which formed the biggest pillar, and on the topic of the Palestine-Israel conflict, they have stayed in line with the Vatican. Compliance with the Vatican notwithstanding, there are different Catholic action groups active within the Netherlands that dissent from the general catholic policy.

## De Volkskrant as a catholic newspaper in the Netherlands

As Joan Hemels writes in his book on the history of the Volkskrant, unity within the Catholic pillar was more a pursuit encouraged by ecclesiastical authority than the true, observable reality that the people within the pillar were living in.<sup>11</sup> This perceived unity was visible in the many newspapers that circulated within the catholic pillar, even before 1919, when De Volkskrant established itself as a new newspaper with a special focus on the catholic working class.<sup>12</sup> There was a distinct aim to make columns from priests, pastors and ecclesiastical speakers not too long nor too difficult, making it easier for the working class to keep up and engage with their faith in a non-church setting. A strong desire was felt to returning to pillarised society as before 1940, and this desire was adhered to in post-war Netherlands. It was in the 1960s that big societal changes shook the ground of the nation, with an upcoming

youth culture shouting for change from the restrictive society they wanted to break out of. It caused the once orderly Dutch society to depillarise. Depillarisation also took place within the media landscape, and De Volkskrant took initiative within the catholic pillar.<sup>13</sup> Once one of the major assets into letting the Catholic stronghold rise, it now was one of the first to demolish it, too.

When Dutch society was pillared, the newspaper, specifically within the Catholic pillar, also functioned as a way for its political leaders to spread their agenda.<sup>14</sup> For De Volkskrant, this meant that its political chief editor Carl Romme, at the same time fulfilled the function of politician in the Dutch parliament for the Catholic People’s Party. For the audience of De Volkskrant, this meant that their political columns were not objective, but influenced by a political agenda that Romme felt needed to be pushed.<sup>15</sup> In his book on the journalistic history of De Volkskrant, Frank de Vree explains that within this time period, just after the end of the Second World War into the 1950s, journalism was seen as a political and religious “calling”, and journalists saw the perceived apostolic character of their job as a natural part of this.<sup>16</sup>

With a country whose societal structure underwent quite a radical change - for Dutch standards - it was only natural that the integral parts of that society changed too. As mentioned before, De Volkskrant took a leading role in depillarising the Catholic pillar in the 1960s, and with that came a new direction for the newspaper. From Catholic mouthpiece to a leftist newspaper where labour unions, students, and the members of leftist-socialist political

parties could often find themselves a free spot to speak their mind, De Volkskrant became almost a pillar on its own within leftist circles in the Netherlands. This idea of De Volkskrant as a leftist newspaper held on for a while, throughout the 1980s, in which professionalisation of the newspaper became the highlight of their decade. Afterwards, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, this division of strict political left versus right ideology became less self-evident. Global political changes such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War forced De Volkskrant to rethink their position and how they would confront new issues. The old leftist 'righteousness' on which they trusted blindly in previous decades was no longer there to guide De Volkskrant. This change led to a new change in direction. Moving away from an outspoken leftist nature, De Volkskrant decided to focus on quality of reporting and providing informative articles above political colour. Their slogan for moving into the 21st century was 'moving past left, moving past right' in order to establish itself as a newspaper that praises itself on quality above all else.<sup>17</sup>

## 1948 and 2002: does religious background matter?

To recapitulate, this paper will firstly look at newspaper articles from De Volkskrant dated from 1948, just after the Nakba started in Palestine, and afterwards it will look at articles dated from 2002, in the middle of the Second Intifada, the Palestinian revolt against Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. What became most noticeable when looking at newspaper articles from 1948 that dealt with Palestine, is that they were mostly small, quick reads. Often, they

were provided to De Volkskrant by bigger press agencies like Reuters or Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANP). However, there are a couple of Volkskrant articles that are written by their own correspondents. One difficulty that rises, is that these correspondents are not named, and therefore no additional research can be done on their backgrounds. Possible personal biases can therefore not be attributed to the author's life, which makes it hard to say whether their contributions were truly as objective and transparent as possible. The first two articles that will be discussed are both printed in the morning edition of 15 May 1948, the day after the Nakba started by the State of Israel declaring their independence. One of them is titled "Jewish State "Israel" recognised by America: Battle in Jerusalem after departure of Cunningham", the other one "Bishops ask for prayers for Palestine". The first article mostly provides factual information, informing the reader about the British forces leaving Palestine and almost immediate recognition by President Truman of the State of Israel.<sup>18</sup> There is one minor mistake, however, when Ben Gurion is named as one of the main people of the Palestinian labour movement, while this should have been Israeli labour movement, respectively. While the text might not provide too much information, the cartoon that comes with the article is more opinionated.

It shows the Israeli people as the underdog, the weaker party in the fight, as David (figure 1), that has to go up against the Goliath that is formed by the Arab countries that surround freshly established Israel. Depicting these countries as a stereotypically Arab Goliath in order to aid Palestine clearly puts them on the other end of the conflict – one



Figure 1: "History repeats itself. Again, David finds himself opposite of Goliath." *De Volkskrant*, 15 May 1948, page 1.

could argue it is the enemies' side. It also shows that *De Volkskrant* was positioning itself within the conflict, and clearly favoured the Israeli state. Not only because of the terrible depiction of an Arab stereotype, but the moral of the story of David and Goliath is that the smaller underdog eventually defeats the giant. Translated to the fight between the Israeli people and the Arab people, this meant that there was a certain kind of hope, perhaps, that the Israelis would win the battle. The second article in the same daily edition of *De Volkskrant* shows more of its catholic nature than the previous article. "Bishops ask for prayers for Palestine" is a small piece on how Dutch bishops responded to the request of the Pope in the Vatican to keep Palestine in their prayers. The Pope expressed his concern for the state of the world, and specifically

oriented catholic prayers to the Holy Places within Palestine; a country that was now overrun with death and destruction.<sup>19</sup> Another article from this period provides some more information on how *De Volkskrant* reported on the conflict in Palestine, an article called "Hate for England grows in the basements of Tel Aviv", dated from 24 May 1948. By now, the Nakba has been going on for a full nine days, yet *De Volkskrant* does not report on it. As Nadia R. Sirhan explains, sometimes, the answer lies in the invisible, the actions that are not shown.<sup>20</sup> A lack of reporting on the Nakba, an omission of information, can be interpreted as representative for something else; it might not have been all that important to report on, or a bias towards one of the parties within the conflict was subtly being pushed. Aforementioned article is written by a 'special correspondent', though their name is not revealed anywhere.<sup>21</sup> The article is written from the Israeli perspective, or at least a perspective that sympathises with the Israeli State. There mainly is positive commentary on the hardworking nature of people in Tel Aviv, and how the compact Israeli forces managed to defeat the bigger Arab military powers. Opposite to these positive comments rest negative comments towards the Arab forces, as becomes visible in this paragraph:

"They now know that King Ibn Saud did not send his troops to Palestine because he had been beckoned by the Americans that all American subsidies would cease. We know that one word from England to King Abdullah, who is still getting his two million pounds a year, would be enough to bring back the Arab Legion — the only truly



dangerous force in Palestine. The English are hated.”<sup>22</sup>

There is, again, no mention of the other side of the conflict, of the Palestinian that have to flee their home country in pursuit of safety. There is no mention of Christian Palestinians that are in the middle of a dooming war. Besides the one article that reports on bishops all over the Netherlands to keep Palestine in their prayers, and the cartoon referring to the myth of David and Goliath, there is no Catholic perspective on the Nakba or the Palestine-Israel conflict as a whole.

Before moving over to 2002, the other year chosen for this paper's media analysis, an interesting *Volkskrant* article from 1981 shows how the newspaper changed over time from a small paper catering to the catholic working class, to a professional and established newspaper in the Dutch media landscape. It is titled "Israel deserves criticism, too", and was written in the column "Open Forum", where *De Volkskrant* invited different people to voice their opinion on a topic, from which could be expected it would lead to a debate. The article was written by historian Selma Leydesdorff, and in her text, she expresses her wish to be able to critique the Israeli state, while also recognising its right to exist, though within pre-1967 borders.<sup>23</sup> Deducting from the title, especially the addition of "too" at the end, it might not be entirely unfair to assume that up until then, Israel had not been given the same amount of critique that the Palestinian-Arab side had received from the media.

Now, in 2002, *De Volkskrant* had moved away completely from its catholic roots that it harboured until the 1960s, and its slightly

more radically leftist image that was established in the 1970s, to a newspaper that moved past strict political division towards a greater focus on quality of reporting. Their reporting on Palestine required more historical knowledge than it did in 1948, because at this point in time, reporting on Palestine meant, more often than not, reporting on the conflict that riddled the country. Additionally, for reporting on Palestine in 2002, a couple of events were pivotal. First of all, the attacks of 9/11 on the Twin Towers in New York City had a profound impact on the world order, and caused a traumatically harsh Islamophobic rhetoric to float around in Western countries. Where previously it was mostly an orientalist gaze that rested over Western reporting on events happening in Arab countries, it was now tinged with an irrational fear and incomprehension of the Arab nations and people. Secondly, in 2000 the Second Intifada had started in Palestine after Ariel Sharon, an Israeli politician, made a provocative visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif, also known as Temple Mount. Just before the visit, peace talks at the Camp David Summit had failed to reach a final agreement, so when Sharon made a goading speech at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, it was cause for the Palestinian people to revolt once more against the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.<sup>24</sup> *De Volkskrant* had its Middle East correspondent of that time, Ferry Biedermann, stationed in Jerusalem, from which he reported on the Second Intifada. On 8 April, an article of his was published, called "Deadly despair, ultimate revenge", in which he writes about the suicide bombers that blew themselves up on Israeli grounds.<sup>25</sup> It reads as an almost standard Western report in which Biedermann refers to the American

President, George W. Bush, condemning the bombers, to grieving Palestinian parents who cannot speak the truth because of community leaders telling them so, ending with a sentence that has become synonymous to reports on Middle Eastern affairs: "The question remains why this happens so much more in this conflict than anywhere else. The self-sacrifice reeks too much to blind fanaticism to completely ignore nationalistic, religious, and other indoctrinations". The tags that are related to this article are, as follows, "terrorism", "politics and state", and "domestic political unrest". The topic tag is "Hamas", while the geographic tag is "Israel".

Another article published in 2002, called "Dirty traitors", was written by editor Nell Westerlaken, and dove into the Israeli peace movement and how it fought against the harsh policies of premier Sharon.<sup>26</sup> Immediately noticeable are the tags related to this article, which are "peace and security", "politics and state", "domestic political unrest", and "demonstrations". While the length of the article allows for it to present a more nuanced image of the peace movement with more background information than the shorter article by Ferry Biedermann, both articles make use of the same language that implicitly holds a lot of prejudicial value. When talking about the Palestinian people, more often than not words like "revenge", "suicide bombing" or "terrorist intent" are used. However, when they are reporting on Israeli violence, they use words such as "retaliatory measure", "action", or "safety measures". This is not new within the discourse on the use of language in conflict situations, and it has perhaps become the norm within the discourse on the Palestine-Israel conflict – showing a clear bias.

However, bias notwithstanding, De Volkskrant as a newspaper is committed to provide multiple angles on the same story, and another article comments on the tough landscape that journalists work under when reporting on the Palestine-Israel conflict. Deedee Derksen and Maud Effting state that Dutch general reporting on the conflict is filled with mishaps and can be quite one-sided.<sup>27</sup> It is not too far-fetched to admit that Dutch history plays a big role in how the media report on Palestine and Israel. There is remaining guilt in our national conscience because of how many Jewish people we deported to Nazi camps from Dutch grounds, which makes Dutch people reluctant to speak negatively on Israeli policy against the Palestinian people. The article further mentions how a majority of Dutch correspondents live in Israeli cities, and only venture to Palestine when needed. The main conclusion is that, while sometimes there are mistakes that wrongly favour Palestinian actions, most of the time Dutch media is inclined to be more favourable towards the Israeli cause.

## Conclusion

Now that articles from 1946, and 2002 are analysed, it begs the question whether the religious nature of De Volkskrant truly had any significant influence on their reporting on Palestine. Journalist standards, more generally media standards, were not as defined in 1948 as they are nowadays in the twenty-first century. Back in 1948, when De Volkskrant was busy in post-war Netherlands to rebuild the catholic pillar; journalistic integrity, impartiality and objectivity had not yet developed to the significant and valuable concepts they are now within journalism. The pillar-specific newspaper was mainly

used to provide the working class with news and gave the political leader of the catholic pillar, C. Romme, a place to elaborate his own political agenda and in doing so, made sure to make his pillar more cohesive. Where the Vatican, and the Catholic Church as a global institution, was very careful in recognising Israel as a state, and very much concerned with its Holy Places in the Holy Land — and the Dutch Catholic Church theoretically followed the lead of the Vatican — this careful attitude was visible in the newspaper articles of *de Volkskrant* as a catholic newspaper. Perhaps this had to do with a distinct distance between the ecclesiastical body and the people, or perhaps this can be linked to the national guilt that was palpable in Dutch society for their prominent role in the deportation of Jewish people in the Second World War. More articles were written in 1948 from the Israeli perspective than from the Palestinian perspective, and this is a fact that also continued well into 2002, as pointed out by Derksen and Effting. However, it must be noted that this paper simply does not have the scope to truly and deeply dive into the relationship between religion and journalism. Perhaps, if one were to analyse more articles from the *Volkskrant* than were touched upon in this paper, a completely different answer might occur. It is an interesting topic, nevertheless, and it would certainly deserve to be researched with more care and diligence. For now, the main conclusion is that no, the catholic nature of *De Volkskrant* did not influence its reporting on Palestine in 1948, but that there were other factors at play that were more important in shaping a narrative, such as pillarised society, weak journalistic standards, national guilt and an international western agenda. It was mainly with the professionalisation of *De Volkskrant* that

their reporting on Palestine changed, and there was no correlation between the Vatican's position on Palestine-Israel.

<sup>1</sup> Sumaya Awad, Annie Levin, "Roots of the Nakba: Zionist Settler Colonialism", in *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*, edited by Sumaya Awad & Brian Bean (Haymarket Books: Chicago, 2020), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Friso Wielenga, "Pillarisation, Stability, Crisis and War (1918-1945)", in *A History of the Netherlands: From the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), chapter 6, Kobo.

<sup>3</sup> Nadia R. Sirhan, *Reporting Palestine-Israel in British newspapers: an analysis of British newspapers* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Sumaya Awad, Annie Levin, "Roots of the Nakba: Zionist Settler Colonialism," in *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*, edited by Sumaya Awad & Brian Bean (Haymarket Books: Chicago, 2020), 22-43.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony O'Mahony, *The Vatican, the State of Israel, and Christianity in the Holy Land*, *International Journal for the study of the Christian Church*, 5:2, 124.

<sup>6</sup> "All refugees" in this sentence refers to all the Palestinian people who fled their home country, no matter their religious background. The Catholic Church did not only take care of the catholic Palestinians, but of all other Palestinians, too.

<sup>7</sup> Peter M. Marendy, *Anti-Semitism, Christianity, and the Catholic Church: Origins, Consequences, and Responses*, *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 47 No. 2 (Spring 2005), 289-307.

<sup>8</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, published 15 October 1965, accessed on 14 June 2022, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html).

<sup>9</sup> "Erkenning Israel en Vaticaan Accord wordt vandaag ondertekend; paus kan op bezoek naar Heilige Land", *Trouw*, 30 December 1993, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/erkenning-israel-en-vaticaan-akkoord-wordt-vandaag-ondertekend-paus-kan-op-bezoek-naar-heilige-land~b79f3e35/>.

<sup>10</sup> Friso Wielenga, "Pillarisation, Stability, Crisis and War (1918-1945)", in *A History of the Netherlands: From the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), chapter 6, Kobo.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Hemels, "Inleiding", in *De emancipatie van een dagblad: Geschiedenis van de Volkskrant* (Baarn: Uitgeverij Ambo, 1981, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Hemels, *De emancipatie van een dagblad*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Frank de Vree, "Inleiding: de Paaskrant van 1968", in *De metamorfose van een dagblad: een journalistieke geschiedenis van de Volkskrant* (Meulenhoff: Amsterdam, 1996), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Vree, *De metamorfose van een dagblad*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Vree, *De metamorfose van een dagblad*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Vree, *De metamorfose van een dagblad*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Annet Mooij, "Alles wordt anders (2000-2006)", in *Dag in dag uit: Een journalistieke geschiedenis van de Volkskrant vanaf 1980* (De Bezige Bij: Amsterdam, 2011), 218-220.

<sup>18</sup> "Joodse Staat 'Israël' door Amerika erkend: Slag in Jeruzalem na vertrek van Cunningham", *De Volkskrant*, 15 May 1948, p.1, accessed 17 June 2022 on Delpher, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010880733:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>19</sup> "Bisschoppen vragen gebed voor Palestina", *De Volkskrant*, 15 May 1948, p. 5, accessed 17 June 2022 on Delpher, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010880733:mpeg21:p003>.

<sup>20</sup> Nadia R. Sirhan, "Introduction", in *Reporting Palestine-Israel in British Newspapers: an analysis of British newspapers* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 2.

<sup>21</sup> "Haat tegen Engeland groeit in de kelders van Tel Aviv", *De Volkskrant*, 24 May 1948, p. 1, accessed June 17 2022 on Delpher, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010880739:mpeg21:p001>.

<sup>22</sup> "Haat tegen Engeland groeit in de kelders van Tel Aviv", *De Volkskrant*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Seyla Leydesdorff, "Israël verdient óók kritiek", *De Volkskrant*, 3 December 1981, p. 15, accessed 17 June 2022 on Delpher, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ABCDDD:010879739:mpeg21:p013>.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Pressman, *The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 23(2) 2006, 114-141.

<sup>25</sup> Ferry Biedermann, "Dodelijke wanhoop, ultieme wraak", *De Volkskrant*, 8 April 2002, p. 4, accessed 18 June 2022 on Nexis Uni.

<sup>26</sup> Nell Westerlaken, "Vuile Verraders", *De Volkskrant*, 13 april 2002, p. 31, accessed 18 June 2022 on Nexis Uni.

<sup>27</sup> Deedee Derksen and Maud Effting, "Antisemit of joodse hielenlikker", *De Volkskrant*, 15 June 2002, p. 1S, accessed 19 June 2022 on Nexis Uni.

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# Honey, It's Just Camp

An Inquiry into the History of Camp  
Culture from the 1960s to Modern-day  
Pop Culture

*By Melanie Lim*

## Introduction

The day had finally arrived. The Costume Institute announced its theme for The Met Gala of 2019: "Camp: Notes on Fashion." Based on Susan Sontag's 1964 essay *Notes on Camp*, this seemingly simple theme caused a significant amount of confusion among attendees and spectators. The following days showed audiences deep-diving into the worldwide web of pop culture to find out what the peculiar phrase exactly meant, unaware of its fleeting and puzzling definition. This essay will answer the question "How did camp transform from a queer aesthetic in the 1960s to an element in modern-day pop culture?"

It was Susan Sontag's work of 1964 that gave a honourable interpretation to the very elusive and not very talked-about aesthetic. Sontag's understanding of camp as a 'sensibility' became commonplace in later writings about camp. She stated that "the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."<sup>1</sup> This statement has served as a mantra for camp people. It has been described with adjectives such as exaggerated, high energy, performative, tongue-in-cheek, and ironic just for irony's sake. Camp is a very complex phrase that has had many different definitions over the years with its ever-evolving state. It is always changing forms, taking different shapes and reacting to the culture of the time, while it is often considered to present love for something old-fashioned and out of use.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, camp was a 'Polari' word in the late nineteenth century, meaning it was mainly used by people of theatre,



**"TO TALK ABOUT CAMP IS THEREFORE TO BETRAY IT."**

– Susan Sontag, *Notes on Camp*. (1964)

performers and correspondents alike.<sup>3</sup> It later developed into a primarily private code of secret communication of queer identity, particularly used before the gay rights movement of the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Following Sontag's work of 1964, camp was pushed into the spotlights, seeping through the cracks of popular culture art forms and genres and into public consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Camp became not only a means to express oneself in fashion; it became a powerful tool to criticise oppression. Much like a peacock's tail feathers are not only flashy but also serve a purpose, camp is highly political.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will focus on the development of camp starting with the first occurrence of the word 'camp' and extending to present-day forms of camp. This essay focuses on the queer history of camp in particular. It aims to do so by giving a brief history of camp, followed by discussion about Andy Warhol's work. The first chapter of this essay intends to give a clear vision of what camp is by looking at different definitions noted over different periods. It will establish a foundation for exploring the etymology of the term. This will provide a historiography of different perspectives about the origins of camp. The second chapter will examine the contemporary relevance of camp and its recent popularity with the Met Gala of 2019 by looking into people who have been considered to be important figures in solidifying the modern camp aesthetic.



## Camp? I Hardly Know Her!

The definition of camp has always been in a state of evolution. A work that indisputably helped solidify the modern camp aesthetic is Susan Sontag's Parisian Review essay *Notes on Camp* in 1964.<sup>7</sup> Sontag set out to explain the term through her essay compiled of 58 points. This format serves as a homage to playwright Oscar Wilde, who she deems as the founding figure of modern camp sensibility. Sontag's most cited explanation of the meaning of Camp is that "the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."<sup>8</sup> Camp emphasises theatricality and performance as it differentiates itself from reality, dramatising its unreality. Secondly, camp exaggerates. It takes emotions and feelings to their extreme —and then pushes them even further. Camp is completely over the top; a taste for excess. Sontag also wrote that camp is "art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is 'too much.'"<sup>9</sup> Camp plays with the idea of anti-seriousness by turning serious into frivolous and frivolous into serious.<sup>10</sup> Irony plays a big part in camp. Philip Core argued in his book *Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth* of 1984 that a camp person carries "a secret within the personality which one ironically wishes to conceal and to exploit."<sup>11</sup>

It is my understanding that camp is inherently subjective. It can subvert expectations, typically in a hyperbolic way, but camp can also be engaging in the mundane as a way to undermine the expectation that one would overperform. It does not take anything too seriously except being exactly what it is: camp. Camp is intentionally absurdist and intentionally performative, usually associated with

theatricality and humour.<sup>12</sup> It is dramatic for the sake of dramatics. It is an exaggeration of things that are fun and silly, but there is always a sense of complete earnestness at its core. You must not take life too seriously. You have to be able to see the absurdity of life from outside of yourself.

## Origins and Etymology of Camp

Although some accounts of camp only date back to the late nineteenth century, the term has deep roots in seventeenth-century France.<sup>13</sup> The term originates from the French word *se camper*. It was first used in 1672 in France in a play by Molière called *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (The Impostures of Scapin).<sup>14</sup> The scene starts with a young aristocrat who is told to go in disguise in an attempt to bluff his way out of things with his father and the term comes about as "Camp about on one leg. Put your hand on your hip and strut like a comedy king!"<sup>15</sup> In this context, camp meant to prance and frolic around. This shows that camp has always been associated with a flare of flamboyance and theatricality. In studying the origins of camp, Boot wrote that the camp aesthetic can be further seen in places such as the Palace of Versailles, and the court of the Sun King. Louis XIV is well-known for diverting the nobility's attention away from politics by holding grand balls alongside other accompanying festivities.<sup>16</sup> His younger brother Philippe I, Duc d'Orleans, who built the palace, was a camp icon.<sup>17</sup> He reportedly desired to dress as a woman himself, revelling in the joy when people mistook him for one.<sup>18</sup> Camp people have always idealised the seventeenth-century court since men were more preening and expressive than women, and because of the strict etiquette rules that went with it.

Meanwhile, some characteristics that came to be associated with the camp aesthetic can be found in the Rococo movement which emerged in the 1720s. The style is characterised by an abundance of curves, pastel colours, elegance and grace, and has been described as "playful, elegant, highly artificial."<sup>19</sup> The art style was highly theatrical and dramatic with ridiculous scenes depicted in paintings. In contrast to the Baroque movement, Rococo preferred irregularity and asymmetry over seriousness, and Rococo paintings were often an amazing theatre of movement and light. A well-known example would be *The Swing* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, where a young woman is pictured elegantly on a swing.<sup>20</sup> Afterwards, it crops up again in France in 1863 with Theophile Gautier who is best known for writing the gender-fluid character of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, which is very camp in itself. In studying female camp androgyny, Piggford wrote that the connection between camp and androgyny is fairly obvious.<sup>21</sup> Piggford argues that androgyny, like camp, aims to liberate the individual from the constraints of the appropriate, making the viewer question their assumptions about gender roles.<sup>22</sup> In Gautier's novel *Captain Fracasse* he says the following translated: "Matamore camped it up in an extravagantly angular pose which his great thinness served to make even more ridiculous."<sup>23</sup> He uses *se camper* here meaning the practice to act effusively with elements of theatricality, exaggeration and flamboyance.

In 1909, camp was first recorded on paper in a dictionary of Victorian slang by James Ware, meaning "actions and gestures of an exaggerated emphasis."<sup>24</sup> The dictionary entry showed: "Probably from the French.

Used chiefly of persons of exceptional want of character —to queer (of-questionable-character, not-in-a-normal-condition, forged) people."<sup>25</sup> For the first time, this linking to theatricality and queer culture is recorded on paper which is highly linked to the theatre world with 'Polari'.<sup>26</sup> In the early twentieth century, Polari came to be a form of lingo that was used often by theatrical people. It was a spoken "language" as you could not have full conversations with it but you would come close to full sentences and questions.<sup>27</sup>

So while Sontag popularised camp, this is not to say that she invented the concept. Sontag herself mentioned Christopher Isherwood who published a decade prior to Sontag's essay his novel *The World in the Evening* in 1954.<sup>28</sup> Isherwood describes camp in a very similar manner as Sontag. In a brief scene, the protagonist attempts to explain "High camp" and "Low Camp" by using words such as "fun and artifice and elegance."<sup>29</sup> Similarly to Sontag, he says: "You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it."<sup>30</sup> *The World in the Evening* stands exemplary for an important element that many academics have been criticised for: the absence of an acknowledged gay influence on camp. This criticism can also be applied to Sontag's acclaimed essay. Moe Meyer stated that Sontag minimized the involvement of homosexuality to aid the public in accepting camp easier.<sup>31</sup> Sontag fails to credit the queer community in the development of camp by stating that someone else would have invented camp if the homosexuals had not.<sup>32</sup> She further describes the relationship between camp and homosexuality as "a peculiar affinity and overlap", which arguably

does not serve justice to the influence homosexuality had on camp.<sup>33</sup>

On the contrary to these allegations, on that same page of her essay, she states that homosexuals "more or less invented" camp and acknowledges that homosexuals "by and large, constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp."<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, it does take away the queerness of camp. Although heterosexual people may enjoy these extravagant aesthetics, they would not have been able to shape the concept like queer people did because camp has always served as a tool for marginalised communities.<sup>35</sup> This will be explained further in the article. There has not been this similar need for camp among the heterosexual community. Because they are the dominant culture, their vices frequently go unrecognised despite the fact that they can be just as outrageous. That is why Sontag's failure to properly credit the queer community for camp may be interpreted as an attempt to integrate heterosexual people into camp culture. As you cannot subscribe to the system of beauty that has no understanding of you, you create an alternate system of evaluating taste that is based on extravagance, effort, ambition and passion instead of beauty or respectability.

Following Sontag's essay, the discourse of camp became one that would continually attempt to appropriate queer connotations.<sup>36</sup> This caused camp to intermingle and branch into a wide network of other cultural movements such as pop culture. Camp became a key component in the evolution of pop culture. Many other academics on popular culture have given various reasonings for how camp became

as we know it today. This is not to say that they have completely ignored queer involvement when discussing the development of camp. Although writers such as Andrew Ross have recognized the important role of queer people, they aim to find other relating elements and causes that were significant for the development of camp. The work of Andrew Ross *Uses of Camp* has been prominent in this discussion as he argues that camp has a political significance in redefining social relations between classes, thus rejecting Susan Sontag's statement that camp is "depoliticised—or at least apolitical."<sup>37</sup> According to Ross, the camp philosophy served as an "operation of taste," allowing marginalised communities to form an integrated identity out of disposable components of popular culture.<sup>38</sup> For instance, camp's veneration of female stars, seeing them as emotional subjects rather than objects, contributed to the reforming of accepted sexual roles and sexual identities.<sup>39</sup> Ross gives the example of how 'the camp liberator' destabilised traditional definitions of culture by rediscovering and resurrecting history's excluded waste material, forming a cultural economy.<sup>40</sup> He calls camp "the re-creation of surplus value from forgotten forms of labor."<sup>41</sup> Inevitably, camp became an important ingredient to the uprising of the cultural egalitarianism that occurred in the sixties, or as Ross puts it, a "classless culture."<sup>42</sup> Pop aficionados simply proclaimed everything and everyone equal.

## Following the Stonewall Riots

The general loosening of bourgeois structures in the 1960s created a less repressive atmosphere which reached its zenith in 1969 with the Stonewall riots. On

June 26 1969, in New York, police officers raided the Stonewall Inn, a homosexual bar in Greenwich Village.<sup>43</sup> Patrons of the bar decided to finally retaliate against a long-standing pattern of police harassment and social discrimination.<sup>44</sup> Protesters, many of whom were drag queens, took to the streets to express their anger and rage. Their response initiated a riot that carried on the next three nights.<sup>45</sup> The Stonewall riots are easily seen as one of the most significant events in LGBTQ+ history. The event is generally viewed by academics as the inauguration of the modern gay rights movement.<sup>46</sup> Their widely publicised resistance to police harassment prompted a new impetus for homosexual political action in the United States, as well as increased visibility for drag and queer culture. However, as these cultures became more visible, their fashion styles became more accessible to the larger culture, which frequently imitated the style without necessarily adopting the sexual identity. This cultural appropriation continued in the decades that followed as 'mass camp' became more popular and more relevant in modern-day aestheticism.<sup>47</sup> Cultural appropriation is the unacknowledged adoption of anything from one culture or identity by someone from another culture or identity, most often someone from a dominant culture represented in society.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, camp's subordinate position to pop culture does not come as a surprise. Moe Meyer argues that when camp is subjected to a dominant culture, it automatically loses its queer agency.<sup>49</sup> This is due to the dominant culture's proclivity to claim to have 'rediscovered' whatever they come across and try to claim it as their own.<sup>50</sup> Dominant culture is meant as the

predominant culture followed by the largest group of people and therefore the most widely supported, and in this case: popular culture. As camp became more exposed to the general public, it was eventually absorbed by popular culture, with its queer connotations being overlooked. According to Meyer, the dominant will always appropriate whatever aspects camp chooses to put in its path, and camp is well aware of this fact.<sup>51</sup> Camp then, paradoxically, can seamlessly incorporate queer knowledge into dominant ideology due to this knowledge of its future appropriation. Ironically, operating camp as a tool to criticise dominant ideology through a queer parody, is very camp in itself.

Similarly to Meyer, Kathrin Horn talks about camp being used as a tool by an oppressed community to protest the lack of a safe social space whilst also providing humour, solidarity and taste.<sup>52</sup> Horn first discusses how within the pre-Stonewall community camp culture, camp was already "a means of communication and survival."<sup>53</sup> As Fabio Cleto puts it, camp was a 'survivalist strategy' for dealing with a hostile environment.<sup>54</sup> The discourse surrounding camp created a framework in which people were able to build political power.<sup>55</sup> Still, Horn depicts a shift in the perception of camp during the Pre-Stonewall period, in which gay activists rejected camp because of internalised self-hatred.<sup>56</sup> What happened next dealt a blow to the upcoming gay rights movement, because the dismissal of camp allowed authors such as Susan Sontag to label camp as depoliticised.<sup>57</sup> As a result of this depoliticisation, the camp sensibility became more institutionalised and widely available, something Barbara Klinger refers

to as “mass camp sensibility,”<sup>58</sup> Klinger writes about a ‘democratising’ of culture that occurred in the 1950s, in which mass media production led audiences to lower their cultural standards.<sup>59</sup> They started to prefer mass media products and low art, which has always defined the camp sensibility, and because of the expansion of mass culture, camp gradually assimilated into a mass aesthetic.<sup>60</sup> Following the assimilation of camp, Horn states that it was then rediscovered in the 1980s as a meaningful strategy of political criticism by shifting its focus from essentialism to performativity.<sup>61</sup> This meant that camp was now open to a wider audience rather than being a ‘survivalist strategy’ for a marginalised ‘in-group’.<sup>62</sup>

## Contemporary Camp

Pop art plays a significant role in the process of camp’s assimilation into mass culture as pop celebrated mass media products as a direct attack on high art, and continued to destabilise cultural frameworks.<sup>63</sup> Pop artwork such as Andy Warhol’s infamous Campbell’s Soup Cans springs to mind.<sup>64</sup>

Campbell’s Soup Cans by Andy Warhol is a series of individual canvases of 32 flavours of Campbell’s soup that was available in stores in the year 1962, the year wherein this exhibit aired.<sup>65</sup> The original exhibit had the canvases resting on different white shelves, similar to how you would have seen it in a grocery store.<sup>66</sup> He used silk screen printing to get the initial image of the soup can onto the canvas, and then hand-lettered the individual details for the different flavours.<sup>67</sup> So audiences saw these mass-production techniques of mechanisation being used on art; in contrast to the idea that art was supposed to be unique and precious, rather

than mass-produced of objects and logos used to sell us things.<sup>68</sup> This work can be interpreted as camp as it pushes the envelope by removing everyday objects from their mundane settings and making it into ‘fine art.’ It was a parody of mass production and the capitalist consumerist culture that was very present in the 1960s.<sup>69</sup> Andrew Ross argues that Warhol’s work was not only a critique of exploitative capitalism, but it also suggested that art has something directly to do with consumership, relating it back to Ross’ idea of the cultural economy.<sup>70</sup> Warhol’s work was a commentary on his time; he challenged the notion of artistic elitism, which held that only those with the proper training could go on to become legends of the artworld.<sup>71</sup> Andy Warhol’s work toyed with the relationship of avant-garde art and commercial art. In studying Warhol’s usage of camp, Matthew Tinkcom argues the importance of camp’s contributions to the pop scene.<sup>72</sup> Tinkcom writes about how Warhol and his queer contemporaries in the New York cinema underground mocked the dynamics of mass-cultural production and challenge the margins of its viewership through their camp performativity.<sup>73</sup> His films from the infamous Silver Factory were considered very provocative, frequently involving same-sex relations, transgender characters and superstars in drag.<sup>74</sup> The film *Camp* from 1965 is another prime example of Warhol’s usage of camp, in which Warhol does stress camp’s queer connotations.<sup>75</sup> It featured camp icons such as Baby Jane Holzer, Mario Montez, and Jack Smith. *Camp* (1965) has since been considered as part of the queer ‘cultural canon’ and has been referenced in many camp productions.<sup>76</sup> Being queer, Warhol had a great interest in

gender norms, sexuality and the construction of gender identity himself.<sup>77</sup> For instance, having a longstanding interest in drag, he created numerous self-portraits in drag.<sup>78</sup> By repeatedly demonstrating these marginalised voices, Warhol created a safe space with his work in which he aided in paving the way for future queer people to express themselves more freely.<sup>79</sup>

Drag plays a significant role in camp culture, specifically queer camp.<sup>80</sup> Ester Newton argues in her ethnographic analysis *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* that camp describes more of a relationship between things, and that in this case, the 'camp taste' is synonymous with homosexual taste.<sup>81</sup> While challenging what mainstream audiences think of as androgyny devoid of any femininity, drag pushes normative expectations and boundaries of gender and sexuality.<sup>82</sup> Drag has frequently been accused of sexism and morally wrongdoing due to its exaggeration of feminine codes. However, the performers describe their performances as work; it is their profession.<sup>83</sup> As their activities cannot be fully assimilated into the established order of things, this declaration of work is crucial in preventing them from being referred to as "the insane."<sup>84</sup> According to José Esteban Muñoz, minority performers use disidentification, frequently engaging with dominant cultural texts, to reveal and subvert hegemonic narratives.<sup>85</sup>

Since the 1960s, drag has become increasingly popular, reaching a global audience with the debut of RuPaul's Drag Race in 2009, an American competition reality television series that only features drag queens and drag culture.<sup>86</sup> Drag culture's acceptance and celebration on national television represents the

emancipation and liberation from enduring and suffocating definitions of gender and sexuality.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, RuPaul's Drag Race is more than just a witty show in which drag queens dance around and lip sync. The vengeful nature of its format, which demands that there be winners and losers from one episode to the next, teaches us exclusivity and competition rather than inclusion and community.<sup>88</sup> Joke Hermes then contends that RuPaul's Drag Race exemplifies the complexities of today's desire for 'freedom,' while also engaging the audience in political discussions about gender and sexuality.<sup>89</sup>

A key component of camp is the exploration of gender norms and sexuality, which includes the use of androgyny. Similar to drag, androgyny refers to the fluidity of sexual traits and attempts to liberate the individual from the limits of the appropriate gender.<sup>90</sup> Since the 1970s, the appearance of more androgynous figures in popular culture has pushed camp further into the dominant culture. A prime example of the 'camp androgyne' is Annie Lennox, the vocalist for the pop duo Eurythmics, who was well-known as an androgynous figure in British popular culture.<sup>91</sup> In their music video for 'Love is a Stranger,' Lennox experimented with the transformative process that morphed her from a woman to a man visually.<sup>92</sup> Lennox made her first appearance in this video, riding in the back of a limousine dressed as a high-class call-girl, complete with a long blond wig, feminine make-up, and a full-length mink coat. Throughout the video, she transforms from a prostitute to a businessman who purchases their services, and finally into a puppet-like male figure being controlled. This transformation, which included the

stereotypical de-wigging typical of female impersonators' acts, blurred the line between male and female, and it perfectly reinforced the lyrics that focused on obsessive love and the loss of self-control as a result of it. However, her successful performance of androgyny sparked controversy in the United States as it supposedly posed a threat to the existing norms of gender performance, prompting her to confirm she was a woman and not a 'transvestite'.<sup>93</sup>

Camp was further pushed into mainstream audiences with the exhibition "Camp, Notes on Fashion" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2019.<sup>94</sup> The annual Met Gala took place on May 6 2019, taking the new exhibition as its theme which made viewers wait with some trepidation. Critics were sceptical as there are inherent issues in bringing a subcultural manifestation like the camp sensibility to a mainstream audience.<sup>95</sup> Whereas RuPaul's Drag Race still had a predominantly homosexual audience, the Met Gala of 2019 required celebrities who might not be familiar with the camp sensibility to conform to this queer aesthetic.<sup>96</sup> This raised the possibility of misunderstandings and the need to change messages and meanings to meet broader social agendas or moral and ethical requirements. The exhibition that was based on Susan Sontag's essay *Notes on Camp* of 1964 gave a well-rounded representation of the camp sensibility whilst also making it fun and playful to watch.<sup>97</sup> However, a large portion of the male guests of the Met Gala seemed to neglect the theme at all, as many of them showed up in the standard look of the black suit.

## Conclusion

Camp has travelled a long way from seventeenth-century France to the 2019 Met Gala. Academics have offered various explanations for how camp developed into what it is today, starting with Moe Meyer who is an advocate of camp's roots in the queer community. He criticised other academics work for not giving enough credit to the queer community such as Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp*.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, while acknowledging the queer influence, Andrew Ross chose a more political explanation for camp's role in redefining social relations between classes. That environment made room for protest and change, reaching its peak with the Stonewall riots. Camp developed as a political response to the cultural emanations of the gay liberation movements. As a consequence, the Stonewall riots increased the visibility of queer culture in contemporary culture. A negative effect of this exposure was the appropriation of camp manners, which Ross contends is inevitable because camp will always be subordinate to the predominant culture.<sup>99</sup> However, as camp is aware of its status as a subverted subject to dominant culture, camp is free to do whatever it wants; it evolves while maintaining its core values.<sup>100</sup> Kathrin Horn showed the significance of camp within the pre-Stonewall community; camp was then "a means of communication and survival [for gay people]" in a hostile environment.<sup>101</sup> Horn further discussed the political power camp could attain, but it was halted by a shift in mentality in the 1960s, when gay activists began to reject camp as a form of self-hatred.<sup>102</sup> As a result, "mass camp sensibility," came to be, in which audiences decided to adore 'mediocre' mass media products.<sup>103</sup>

This was showcased by looking at artists like Andy Warhol who played into the new trend of mass media products by mechanising his art production. His art piece Campbell's Soup Cans was a camp parody of the mass media culture that stretched and challenged the definition of art by transforming a mundane object into 'fine art'.<sup>104</sup> By the time of the 1980s, camp was available to a wider audience due to its adjustment from being a survival tool for a marginalised group to an art performance.<sup>105</sup> With RuPaul's Drag Race as a prime example, drag has become an important part of camp culture. It represents the emancipation of a marginalised community, which has contributed in the deconstruction and redefining of gender and sexuality norms. Another example is the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition "Camp, Notes on Fashion," where the representation of camp culture was arguably well-presented, although the interpretations of some Met Gala's guests were not up to par.

Regardless of what one might consider camp's origins, it is impossible to ignore the connection between the term's usage in the gay community prior to Stonewall and its appearance in Ware's book in 1909. Given the combination of theatricality, male homosexuality, and aesthetic sense, one may argue that the origins of camp and those who identify as homosexual are inextricably intertwined. This is not to say that camp and queerness are mutually exclusive, but camp cannot exist without queerness. This opens the discussion of accurate representation of marginalised communities in the media. Further research where political questions of gender and sexuality are being raised can make up for a better understanding of how a subcultural

manifestation moves from its original community into mainstream culture and how to address appropriation.

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Penguin UK, 2013), 264.

<sup>2</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 273.

<sup>3</sup> Fabio Cleto, ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject--A Reader*, Illustrated edition (Edinburgh: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>4</sup> William L. Leap, *Language Before Stonewall: Language, Sexuality, History* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 133.

<sup>6</sup> See: Katrin Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," in *Women, Camp, and Popular Culture* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 15–33.

<sup>7</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*.

<sup>8</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 272.

<sup>10</sup> John Adkins Richardson, "Dada, Camp, and the Mode Called Pop", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 4 (1966): 552.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Core, *Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth* (Plexus, 1984), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1979), 106-107.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Booth, "Campe-toil!: On the Origins and Definitions of Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 75.

<sup>14</sup> Molière, *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (Paris, France, 1671), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Booth, "Campe-toil!", 78.

<sup>16</sup> Booth, "Campe-toil!", 76.

<sup>17</sup> Booth, "Campe-toil!", 76.

<sup>18</sup> Booth, "Campe-toil!", 77.

<sup>19</sup> Cyril Barrett, "The Art of Rococo," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 49, no. 194 (1960): 163-164.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing, 1767-1768*, Wallace Collection, London. Smarthistory. <https://smarthistory.org/jean-honore-fragonard-the->



swing/, accessed on 22 June 2022.

<sup>21</sup> George Piggford, "Who's That Girl?: Annie Lennox, Woolf's 'Orlando', and Female Camp Androgyny,"

*Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 30, no. 3 (1997): 39–58.

<sup>22</sup> Piggford, *Female Camp Androgyny*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Booth, "Campe-toil," 75.

<sup>24</sup> Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics*, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Leap, *Language Before Stonewall*, 82–84.

<sup>28</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 264.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening* (Random House, 2012), 103.

<sup>30</sup> Isherwood, *The World in the Evening*, 103.

<sup>31</sup> Moe Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (Routledge, 1998), 255.

<sup>32</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 278.

<sup>33</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 278.

<sup>34</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 278.

<sup>35</sup> Katrin Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 16–17.

<sup>36</sup> Meyer, "Discourse of Camp," 258.

<sup>37</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 265.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (Routledge, 1989), 162.

<sup>39</sup> Ross, *No Respect*, 195–197.

<sup>40</sup> Ross, *No Respect*, 188.

<sup>41</sup> Ross, *No Respect*, 188.

<sup>42</sup> Ross, *No Respect*, 167.

<sup>43</sup> Cynthia Cannon Poindexter, "Sociopolitical Antecedents to Stonewall: Analysis of the Origins of the Gay Rights Movement in the United States," *Social Work* 42, no. 6 (1997): 607.

<sup>44</sup> Poindexter, "Sociopolitical Antecedents to Stonewall," 607.

<sup>45</sup> Poindexter, "Sociopolitical Antecedents to Stonewall," 607.

<sup>46</sup> See also: William Leap, *Language Before Stonewall*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 133.

<sup>48</sup> James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 4–9.

<sup>49</sup> Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 258.

<sup>50</sup> Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 258.

<sup>51</sup> Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 258.

<sup>52</sup> Katrin Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 16–17.

<sup>53</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 16.

<sup>54</sup> Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics*, 89.

<sup>55</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 26.

<sup>56</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 18.

<sup>57</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 18.; Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 265.

<sup>58</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 133.

<sup>59</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 137.

<sup>60</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 137.

<sup>61</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 19–20.

<sup>62</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 19–20.

<sup>63</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Can*, 1964, Los Angeles. Museum of Modern Art.

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79809>, accessed on 23 June 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Museum of Modern Art, "Andy Warhol."

<sup>66</sup> Museum of Modern Art, "Andy Warhol."

<sup>67</sup> Museum of Modern Art, "Andy Warhol."

<sup>68</sup> Anthony E. Grudin, *Warhol's Working Class: Pop Art and Egalitarianism* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 80–86.

<sup>69</sup> Grudin, *Warhol's Working Class*, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Ross, *No Respect*, 209.

<sup>71</sup> Grudin, *Warhol's Working Class*, 70.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Tinkcom, "21 'Warhol's Camp,'" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 344–54.

<sup>73</sup> Tinkcom, "21 'Warhol's Camp,'" 350–54.

<sup>74</sup> Grudin, *Warhol's Working Class*, 118–34.

<sup>75</sup> Katrin Horn, *Women, Camp, and Popular Culture: Serious Excess* (Springer, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Horn, *Women, Camp, and Popular Culture*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz, *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (Duke University Press, 1996), 204.

<sup>78</sup> Doyle, Flatley, and Muñoz, *Pop Out*, 204.

<sup>79</sup> Grudin, *Warhol's Working Class*, 127–28.

<sup>80</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp*, 100.

<sup>81</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp*, 105.

<sup>82</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp*, 5–8.

<sup>83</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Newton, *Mother Camp*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Joke Hermes and Michael Kardolus, "The Rupaul Paradox: Freedom and Stricture in a Competition Reality TV Show," *Javnost - The Public* 29, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 82–97.

<sup>87</sup> Hermes and Kardolus, "The Rupaul Paradox," 84–85.

<sup>88</sup> Hermes and Kardolus, "The Rupaul Paradox," 87.

<sup>89</sup> Hermes and Kardolus, "The Rupaul Paradox," 84–85.

<sup>90</sup> Piggford, "Who's That Girl?," 40, 45.

<sup>91</sup> Piggford, "Who's That Girl?," 40.

- <sup>92</sup> Eurythmics, Eurythmics, Annie Lennox, Dave Stewart - Love Is a Stranger (Official Video), 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6f593X6rv8>.
- <sup>93</sup> Piggford, "Who's That Girl?," 41.
- <sup>94</sup> Andrew Bolton, Camp: Notes on Fashion (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019).
- <sup>95</sup> Mark O'Connell, "Sweetarts: The Politics of Exclusion, and Camping Out with Susan Sontag at the Met," *Fashion Theory* 26, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 27–65.
- <sup>96</sup> Hermes and Kardolus, "The Rupaul Paradox," 84.
- <sup>97</sup> O'Connell, "Sweetarts," 28.
- <sup>98</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*.
- <sup>99</sup> Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 258.
- <sup>100</sup> Meyer, "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," 258.
- <sup>101</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 16-17.
- <sup>102</sup> Horn, "The History and Theory of Camp," 18.
- <sup>103</sup> Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 133.
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# **"The people and time will tell if I am an artist"**

Music As a Way of Political Action In  
Chile Since the 1960s

*By Sebastian Kuthe Fuentes*

## Introduction

"Almost overnight, he became an instant martyr for leftists the over world –and a legendary spectre that may well haunt Latin America for years."<sup>1</sup> This quote was written on the 24th of September of 1973, by the newspaper Times, 13 days after Socialist President Salvador Allende committed suicide and General Augusto Pinochet took over the control of the country after a military coup. The International response, as this quote suggests, was one of support for the Chilean population, and made Allende an internationally recognized icon. During Allende's government, he nationalized several copper companies, built houses for marginalized people, provided half a litre of milk for all children, raised salaries, among other social advancements.<sup>2</sup> The days following September 11 were marked by plain violence, as the military stormed civil houses, arresting and executing political opponents, mainly from the left. Victor Jara was among one of them.

He was taken prisoner on the morning of September 12, 1973. He and 600 people from Universidad Técnica del Estado were taken to Stadium Chile, which was turned into a detention and torture centre.<sup>3</sup> He was detained and taken there for his political views.<sup>4</sup> He was a leftist artist who wrote multiple songs that supported marginalized leftist people, inciting them to fight for equality in a very unequal nation.<sup>5</sup> Victor Jara was tortured in the stadium for three days; his hands were crushed and the soldiers mockingly forced him to play his guitar.<sup>6</sup> He was executed by a soldier playing Russian roulette with his head.<sup>7</sup>

The brutal murder of Victor Jara serves as

an example of how powerful music can be, especially in a political context. Music speaks to people; it gives them the power and the inspiration to change the world, it educates and brings joy to the soul however it can also be used as means of resistance or social criticism. Victor Jara gave a voice to the working class, sang about their shared class struggles, denounced injustices, and dreamt about a fair and dignified future.<sup>8</sup> This paper explores how music was used to engage in politics in Chile over the last 60 years. To explore this topic, the paper will be divided into four segments: The New Chilean song, Exile, The Return of Democracy, and Music as a way of resistance.

The New Chilean Song explores the revival of folklore music during the 1960s and 70s and how it incorporated elements from different parts of Latin America. It will first explain what the New Chilean Song was and then answer the question 'How was music used during Allende's Presidential election?' Exile explores the exile of musicians during Pinochet's bloody regime and answers the question of 'how music was used inside and outside of Chile as a way of stating opposition?' The legacy of Pinochet covers how Chile started slowly healing and the role music played in the Chilean Spring of 2019. This section discusses the legacy of Chilean music of the last 60 years and 'why can music be considered a way of resistance?'. Since the Chilean Spring of 2019 is a recent and ongoing event, there is a lack of secondary sources, whereas both Chileans and scholars from different nations have broadly covered the period that explores the dictatorship and the New Chilean Song. The names of the songs in Spanish were translated by the author and

tried their best to maintain the meaning from Spanish to English.

## The New Chilean Song

On the morning of September 11 1973, President Allende addressed the nation for the last time. In his last speech, he condemned the violent and traitorous acts of the Chilean military forces but also thanked the workers of the country, the women working the fields, and those that would be persecuted by the following regime.<sup>9</sup> He also thanked the youth, those who “sang, gave their joy and their fighting spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Patricia Vilches argues that the previously mentioned quote alludes to the New Chilean Song Movement and that Allende was legitimizing them and thanking them for the role they actively played during his government.<sup>11</sup>

To better understand the New Chilean Song (NCS), it is essential to look at Chile between 1920 and 1960. During this time, Chile tried to implement a Welfare State as well as an economic model known as Import Substitution Industrialization, a model based on inward industrialization, as a way to combat the devastating effects of the Great Depression of 1929.<sup>12</sup> During that time, the Chilean composer and singer-songwriter Violeta Parra started her musical career, a woman who has often been presented as the pioneer of New Latin American Music.<sup>13</sup> Parra travelled to rural areas of Chile, as well as to the places in cities where the working class lived, composing and singing songs based on the struggles of the marginalized classes of modern Chile.<sup>14</sup> An example of this is the song “*Porque los pobres no tienen*” (Because the poor don’t have), where she denounces the religious beliefs that have introcrinated Chilean society,

impacting the poor and marginalized members of society as they “appropriate ethereal concepts.”<sup>15</sup> Violeta exposed the struggle of the Chilean working and rural class throughout her musical career. Despite all this, she was only recognized by most of the Chilean population after her death in 1967.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of her late recognition, Violeta Parra contributed greatly to what would soon become the New Chilean Song, as she combined field labour with traditional music to make songs more linked to the people, to put them in service to the working class. Violeta Parra once said, “Today life is harder and the suffering of the people cannot be neglected by the artist.”<sup>17</sup> This suffering and the hardship of Chilean rural society were reflected during her whole musical career.

Beyond Violeta Parra is the context in which the New Chilean Song emerged. The 1960s were a period of change throughout the world. The world was divided in two, the West under the United States, and the East, influenced by the Soviet Union. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution was seen as a threat to the United States as well as the political advancements of leftist movements in South America which would ultimately lead to the creation of ‘Operation Condor’, a network for US-backed military dictatorships with the goal of eliminating opposition.<sup>18</sup> South America became a place where a constant tug of war was played. In this context, the New Chilean Song emerged as a social movement fueled by political changes. By incorporating traditional Chilean and Latin rhythms into its protests, the movement presented itself as a new option to understand the social and cultural processes of the 1960s in Chile.<sup>19</sup>



Three years before Violeta Parra's death, a small bar was opened in Santiago, known as "La Peña de los Parra", where wine was served and traditional Chilean music was played.<sup>20</sup> From 1965 to 1970, the Peña would be the place where the New Chilean Song interpreters would gather, serving as a location where people could enjoy the New Chilean Song interpreters.<sup>21</sup> The Peñas are traditional Chilean celebrations in locations where people could listen to socially linked music and allowed them to engage in political discussions and activities.

### Musicians from the New Chilean Song

Quilapayún was formed in 1965, and it was one of the most important groups born out of the New Chilean Song (NCS) movement. Like the other NCS groups, Quilapayún had no leader and no frontman, valuing collective work over individual work. Originally, the group was formed by Julio Carrasco, Eduardo Carrasco, and Julio Numhauser, who took inspiration from folklore music. At the end of 1965, the trio met Angel Parra, son of Violeta Parra, and implemented new instruments like the quena, a traditional Andean flute, and charango, a Bolivian string instrument, to their music, giving them a more altiplanic sound.<sup>22</sup> Quilapayún music was composed of altiplanic melodies, romantic songs, but most importantly social struggles and manifestations. At the time, it was no secret that the group had Marxist ideas, as they played at student federations, leftist parties, syndicates, and workers' unions, while also publishing new music on the Dicap label, a label company created by the Communists Youths of Chile in 1967.<sup>23</sup> With that label, Quilapayún would release "*Por Vietnam*" (For Vietnam), the first-ever Dicap album.<sup>24</sup>

Inti-Illimani was born in 1967, out of an interest in Andean rhythms from three students of the Universidad Técnica de Estado, be it from Chile or from somewhere else in Latin America.<sup>25</sup> The songs *Alturas* or *Tatati* are clear examples of Inti-Illimani's characteristic sound. *Alturas* is a three-minute song where the song is guided by the charango and siku (a panpipe from the Andes mountains), the same as *Tatati*, where they implement the quena, leaving the siku aside. Both songs are accompanied by Spanish guitars, strumming to a rhythm guided by a fur drum. The instrumental arrangements by Inti-Illimani show a clear difference from Quilapayún, as they were not guided by politics, but rather by their passion for Andean music. They were not militant of any political party before 1970, although they had contacts with the Communist Youths of Chile, and the (at the time) developing class consciousness of workers' unions and syndicates actively contributed to their music.<sup>26</sup>

Without a doubt, the most influential and famous artist of the New Chilean Song is Victor Jara.<sup>27</sup> Victor Jara was born in rural Chile in the year 1932, his mother taught him how to play the guitar, and years later he would learn Gregorian singing, which allowed him to participate in "Carmina Burana" when he was 21 years old.<sup>28</sup> In 1957 he met Violeta Parra, who would inspire him to keep singing.<sup>29</sup> In the beginning, his music was characterized by traditional Chilean music, mainly from rural areas, and the songs were produced for the people working the fields.<sup>30</sup> In 1966, he released his first album, where the song "*El Arado*" relates the hopes of a land worker for a change and how the work left him completely devastated.<sup>31</sup>

In 1967, he would compose "*El Aparecido*", a song dedicated to Che Guevarra, and in the same LP the song "*Canción de cuna para un niño vago*" (Lullaby for a homeless kid), a song that criticises a sc *Alturas* at *Tatati* abandoned children.<sup>32</sup> Since his beginnings, Jara show *Alturas* athy towards the marginalized members, questioning the radical tenancy in Chile and the creation of a diverse, equal, and just world.<sup>33</sup> *Tatati*, voice would be heard by the working class, who would open their eyes to the unfair oligarchical policies that ruled rural Chile.<sup>34</sup>

### Allende Presidente!

Allende's victory in 1970 marked the first-ever election of a socialist president and the consolidation of the New Chilean Song was fundamental to the election, as their socially committed music was used to promote Allende's presidential campaign.<sup>35</sup> Even in 2022, Victor Jara's name is associated with Allende's government and his campaign implemented during the 1970s.<sup>36</sup> The propaganda song "*Venceremos*" (We will win) is a clear example of how the New Chilean Song contributed to the campaign. "*Venceremos, venceremos con Allende en septiembre a vencer*" ("We will win, we will win, with Allende in September we'll win").<sup>37</sup> The song "Canción del poder popular" was also composed by members of the New Chilean Song, in this case by Inti-Illimani "*Porque esta vez no se trata de cambiar un presidente, será el pueblo quien construya un Chile bien diferente.*"<sup>38</sup> (Because this time it is not about changing a president, it will be the people who build a very different Chile.) After Allende's victory, the song was incorporated into the album *Canto al programa*, an album dedicated to Salvador Allende and his presidential victory. The two mentioned songs can serve as examples of

how the New Chilean Song was implemented during the presidential campaign, and, after Allende's victory, the NCS spread through Chile like never before, while also creating songs in support of the process.<sup>39</sup> Even the lyrics from the song *Venceremos* changed to adapt to the changing times after Allende's victory in the album *Canto al programa*. "*Venceremos venceremos, mil cadenas habrá que romper*"<sup>40</sup> (We will win, we will win, a thousand chains we will break.)

The New Chilean Song during the time became deeply attached to Allende's presidency as well as international themes. One of the most famous Chilean protest songs is "*El derecho de vivir en paz*" (The right to live in peace), a song composed by Victor Jara in 1971 in honor of Ho Chi Minh, condemning the US intervention in Vietnam.<sup>41</sup>

<i>Indochina es el lugar</i>	Indochina is the place
<i>Más allá del ancho mar</i>	Beyond the wide sea,
<i>Donde revientan la flor</i>	Where they ruin the flower
<i>Con genocidio y napalm</i>	With genocide and napalm.
<i>La luna es una explosión</i>	The moon is an explosion
<i>Que funde todo el clamor</i>	That blows out all the clamor.
<i>El derecho de vivir en paz</i>	The right to live in peace. <sup>42</sup>

Victor Jara's songs from 1970 to 1973 were focused on supporting Allende's government as well as its political party, the Unidad Popular, accumulating hate from the Chilean right-wing, hate that would be unleashed in 1973.

### Exile

Due to the New Chilean Song artists' link with Allende's government, it was not a surprise that they soon became a focus of persecution, torture, and exile. Pinochet's regime forced over a million people out of

the country, fifty thousand were tortured and around three thousand people were detained by the military never to be seen again.<sup>43</sup> The record labels that had published NCS music were forced to stop publishing, and artists were put under severe scrutiny by the military, blaming them for the political division within Chilean society.<sup>44</sup>

The children of Violeta Parra, Angel and Isabel were the founders of La Peña de los Parra and, as mentioned before, it served as a space for the diffusion of the New Chilean Song and a place for political discussions and debates. The Peña was raided by the military on various occasions and was forced to close. Isabel and Angel's names appeared on a list of names that had to present to the authorities.<sup>45</sup> Isabel after hiding in a friend's house found political asylum in the Venezuelan embassy.<sup>46</sup> Angel was detained until February 1974 and wanted to keep pursuing a musical career inside Chile, however, the military deported him from Chile in November of the same year as his figure was associated with the Unidad Popular and Allende, which was forbidden in Chile after the coup.<sup>47</sup> Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún were outside of Chile when the military came to power, the first one being in Italy, and the other one in France, starting their exile before the military coup.<sup>48</sup>

## Resistance

Pinochet's policies aimed to exterminate any and every kind of opposition, creating a cultural blackout during the first years of the regime. However, that did not mean that people stopped consuming culture. Even though the Peña de los Parra closed, the number of folkloric peñas grew, which served as a place of encounter and union of

dissident sectors of society, becoming a fundamental space to organize and plan a political resistance.<sup>49</sup> The most famous and dangerous form of opposition was the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front or the FPMR), an urban guerilla responsible for the death of senator Jaime Guzmán, a key person in the development of the Chilean constitution of 1980, and a failed assassination on Pinochet.<sup>50</sup> The guerilla used home-recorded songs in cassettes and used them as propaganda. The cassette proved to be a very effective method to prevent government interception, as they circulated easily and were homemade.<sup>51</sup> Among the songs used by the FPMR is the Anthem of the FPMR, Hymn of the Rodriuguista Militias, and Commander Tamara.

Los Prisioneros was a band formed in 1979. Their first album was released in 1984, titled *La Voz de los 80*, with songs filled with resentment. The band called the people to not trust and follow the national leader, Pinochet, in the song *No Necesitamos Banderas*.<sup>52</sup> In the song *Latinoamerica es un pueblo al sur de Estados Unidos* the band incites to not fall in Westernization, exposing how the big nations saw and still see Latin America as well as the impact that the cold war had in the territory.<sup>53</sup> The album's titular song, *La Voz de los '80* encouraged the population to be agents of change during the 80s, a theme that was well developed throughout the album.<sup>54</sup> Despite the censorship imposed by Pinochet, the group still managed to break through by using pirated cassettes, impacting greatly the collective memory and idea of identity among the generation born during the military dictatorship.<sup>55</sup> In the years that followed, the band released over five

albums, and among them was the song *Por qué no se van*, a song that criticized the Latino that wanted to become a “second-hand westerner”, criticizing the Eurocentric views that were and still are very common in South America.<sup>56</sup> *El Baile de los que Sobran* criticized the quality of education the low sectors of Chilean society received when compared to the quality of private institutions that the higher classes enjoyed, a song that became an anthem during various political demonstrations and protests in Chile.<sup>57</sup>

The Patriotic Front wrote songs that aimed to incite violent, armed action, used as propaganda, whereas Los Prisioneros wrote songs that did not actively aim for the creation of armed opposition, but tried to use music as a peaceful way of stating opposition. This opposition would spread around the youth who were born during the military dictatorship, exposing the fake idea of a “perfect” country, and becoming the main cultural platform for resistance against Pinochet. Many scholars considered their lyrics the key component of their music for the social and cultural relevance that they possess.<sup>58</sup>

### New Chilean Song in exile

The number of Chileans that were forced into exile was significantly high, which allowed them to set in motion various manifestations and acts with the goal of exposing the violence that the military exercised on the civil opposition.<sup>59</sup> As a result, in various parts of America, as well as in Europe, new institutions were created to aid the refugees and work on political and cultural diffusion. Countless protest acts, concerts, and festivals were carried out around the globe where the participation of

the New Chilean Song proved to be fundamental when analyzing the political spectre of Chile.<sup>60</sup>

During exile, and after the solidary euphoria came to an end, Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún, as well as other exiled Chilean artists, were forced to professionalize their music. They were seen as professional artists and were judged under those criteria, allowing the artists to grow as a result of exile.<sup>61</sup> Even though they were forced to professionalize, their militant aspect suffered no change, singing for those that were displaced, changing the themes from collective popular struggle to spreading the idea of non-violent resistance to reach utopian freedom. This change did not mean that they abandoned their political ideas, they chose to focus them on peacemaking rather than a polarizing one.<sup>62</sup>

### The Legacy of Pinochet

The 1989 Plebiscite brought an end to the terrifying regime, and Chile started to slowly heal its wounds. The governments that followed supposedly aimed for the reconciliation between opposing classes and the pursuance of justice for those whose human rights were violated. The fact that Augusto Pinochet died without facing justice for his actions, as well as the lack of assumption of responsibility from the sectors involved, and the change from “Dictatorship” to “Military Regime” in school texts, proves the point that the pursuit of justice by the Chilean state was mediocre.<sup>63</sup> By 2013 only 262 people were convicted for humanitarian crimes, with over a thousand cases still pending.<sup>64</sup>

On September 5 of 2009, Victor Jara had a second funeral that had countless

attendants. When he died, his widow buried him in an unmarked grave so that the military could not find and defile his body, but in 2009, Jara traversed Santiago for the last time, accompanied by a crowd of people, honoring the memory of all of those who were affected by Pinochet dictatorship, the tortured, exiled, murdered and disappeared.<sup>65</sup> A spokesperson of the Foundation Victor Jara mentions how "that day we brought him to life, and since then he's been with us."<sup>66</sup> This quote confirms the notion that his persona and his memory as of 2022 are still present in Chilean and South American society, and has led many recent South American artists to take inspiration from his music.

Even though Pinochet's dictatorship came to an end, his policies are still present in Chilean society, as the constitution that was written during times of political persecution still has not been changed. Present Chilean society is going through a lot of changes to become a fair and dignified society. After a plebiscite in 2020, Chile decided that it was time to change the constitution established in 1989. In October 2019, a massive wave of protests demanded a change in the neoliberal system, the legacy of Pinochet. An increase in the price of public transport was the last drop. "It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years" became the most famous phrase that englobed the general feeling of the people.<sup>67</sup> During the time, President Piñera said "we are at war, against a very powerful enemy", installed a curfew, and declared a state of emergency, something that had not happened since Pinochet's dictatorship and polarized the people even further.<sup>68</sup> On October 25, five days after Piñera's violent speech, Victor Jara's "El derecho de vivir en paz" was played by musicians in the

peaceful protest "A thousand guitars for Peace". Another song that was played during the protests was "*El baile de los que sobran*" by Los Prisioneros, a song that most of the participants knew, generating a party-like environment, and deeply linked to the inequalities that Chile has. "It's a song for all of us who lost out, but that's still cool because it's like throwing them in the face, look what I do with your arrogance, I'll dance it to you."<sup>69</sup> The two songs used in the protests serve as a way of stating resistance peacefully. They are not on the frontlines or in the barricades, fighting the police forces, they are with their guitars, with their voices, singing and dancing, expressing their needs politely and peacefully. As of 2022, there are still protests going on in Chile.

## Conclusion

The New Chilean Song brought a new way of making politics in Chile. From Violeta Parra's songs about the rural areas of Chile to the peacemaking dream of Victor Jara, shows how the New Chilean Song was deeply connected to the marginalized sectors of society, inside or outside of Chile. The commitment of the New Chilean Song helped Allende become president, where changes based on a socialist way to power aimed to provide better care for the marginalized sectors of Chile. When Pinochet's regime violently ended Allende's presidency, the resistance was done inside and outside of Chile, where Los Prisioneros generated a sense of union and identity in a generation marked by repression and fear. Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún, and other exiled artists and civilians denounced internationally the humanitarian crisis inside Chile. Victor Jara's second funeral served as a way to honour the artist as well as the

memory of all the exiled, tortured, and disappeared during the dictatorship. Once again songs were used as a way of resistance in 2019, to encourage the protesters and demonstrate peacefully the Chilean discomfort.

Given these points, it is clear that politically-oriented music in Chile during the last 60 years was used to denounce the conditions of the marginalized Chilean population, promote political campaigns, encourage the population to work together towards a common goal, and resist the tyranny of Pinochet and state violence started in 2019 as well as encouraging the creation of collective identity and the importance of memory, two themes very important when studying a society that went through a military dictatorship.



**"I AM A WORKER OF MUSIC, I AM NOT AN ARTIST, THE PEOPLE AND TIME WILL TELL IF I AM AN ARTIST. AT THIS MOMENT I AM A WORKER AND A WORKER LOCATED WITH A VERY DEFINED CONSCIENCE, PART OF THE WORKING CLASS THAT FIGHTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BETTER LIFE."**<sup>70</sup>

**Víctor Jara**

<sup>1</sup> "CHILE: The Bloody End of a Marxist Dream," Time, September 24, 1973, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,907929,00.html>.

<sup>2</sup> J. Patrice McSherry, "The Víctor Jara Case and the Long Struggle against Impunity in Chile," *Social Justice* 41, no. 3 (137) (2015): 55.

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Bucciferro, "Songs of Exile: Music, Activism, and Solidarity in the Latin American Diaspora," *JOMEC Journal* 11 (2017): 66.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Augustyn, "Victor Jara," *Biography, Albums, Death, & Facts*, Britannica, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Victor-Jara>.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros: Recuperación de La Memoria Colectiva e

Identidad Cultural a Través de La Música Comprometida," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 25, no. 2 (2004): 202.

<sup>6</sup> McSherry, "The Víctor Jara Case and the Long Struggle against Impunity in Chile," 56.

<sup>7</sup> "Así Mataron a Víctor Jara: Sus Últimos Momentos," News, teleSUR, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.telesur.tv.net/news/victor-jara-muerte-anos-chile-asesinato-20170916-0018.html>.

<sup>8</sup> J. Patrice McSherry, "The Víctor Jara Case and the Long Struggle against Impunity in Chile," *Social Justice* 41, no. 3 (137) (2015): 52.

<sup>9</sup> Salvador Allende, "Último Discurso," Santiago de Chile, Radio Magallanes 11 (1973).

<sup>10</sup> Allende, "Último Discurso".

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros: Recuperación de La Memoria Colectiva e Identidad Cultural a Través de La Música Comprometida," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 25, no. 2 (2004): 197.

<sup>12</sup> Reyes Luciano; Alvarez Fabela, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos": 16.

<sup>13</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros: Recuperación de La Memoria Colectiva e Identidad Cultural a Través de La Música Comprometida," 199.

<sup>15</sup> Vilches, 199.

<sup>16</sup> Vilches, 198.

<sup>17</sup> Alvarez Fabela, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos": La Creación de Un Canto Latinoamericano a Través de Tres Grupos Chilenos Quilapayún, Inti Illimani e Illapu," 21.

<sup>18</sup> J. Patrice McSherry, "Death Squads as Parallel Forces: Uruguay, Operation Condor, and the United States," *Journal of Third World Studies* 24, no. 1 (2007): 13.

<sup>19</sup> Alvarez Fabela, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos," 29–30.

<sup>20</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Alvarez Fabela, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos": La Creación de Un Canto Latinoamericano a Través de Tres Grupos Chilenos Quilapayún, Inti Illimani e Illapu," 31.

<sup>23</sup> Alvarez Fabela, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos," 32.

<sup>24</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 38.

<sup>27</sup> Alvarez Fabela, 23.

- <sup>28</sup> Fundacion Victor Jara, "Infancia – Victor Jara," Fundacion Victor Jara, accessed June 8, 2022, <https://victorjara.fundacionvictorjara.org/infancia/>; Fundacion Victor Jara, "Juventud – Victor Jara," Fundacion Victor Jara, accessed June 8, 2022, <https://victorjara.fundacionvictorjara.org/juventud/>.
- <sup>29</sup> Fundacion Victor Jara, "Música – Victor Jara," Fundacion Victor Jara, accessed June 16, 2022, <https://victorjara.fundacionvictorjara.org/musica/>.
- <sup>30</sup> Fundacion Victor Jara.
- <sup>31</sup> Victor Jara, *El Arado*, Víctor Jara (Demon, 1966).
- <sup>32</sup> ALVAREZ FABELA, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos": La Creación de Un Canto Latinoamericano a Través de Tres Grupos Chilenos Quilapayún, Inti Illimani e Illapu," 23–25.
- <sup>33</sup> Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros: Recuperación de La Memoria Colectiva e Identidad Cultural a Través de La Música Comprometida," 202.
- <sup>34</sup> Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros," 202.
- <sup>35</sup> "En fotos: el golpe militar de 1973 en Chile," BBC News Mundo, September 10, 2013, [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/09/130910\\_galeria\\_chile\\_golpe\\_am](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/09/130910_galeria_chile_golpe_am).
- <sup>36</sup> Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros," 200.
- <sup>37</sup> Victor Jara, *Venceremos*, 1970.
- <sup>38</sup> Inti-Illimani, *Canción Del Poder Popular* (DiCap, 1970).
- <sup>39</sup> ALVAREZ FABELA, "Más Justicia Menos Monumentos": La Creación de Un Canto Latinoamericano a Través de Tres Grupos Chilenos Quilapayún, Inti Illimani e Illapu," 41.
- <sup>40</sup> Inti-Illimani, *Venceremos, Canto al Programa* (DiCap, 1970).
- <sup>41</sup> Antxon Aguirre Sorondo, "El derecho de vivir en paz," *El Diario Vasco*, July 28, 2008, <https://www.diariovasco.com/20080728/gente/derecho-vivir-20080728.html>.
- <sup>42</sup> Victor Jara, *El Derecho de Vivir En Paz, El Derecho de Vivir En Paz* (DiCap, 1971).
- <sup>43</sup> Bucciferro, "Songs of Exile: Music, Activism, and Solidarity in the Latin American Diaspora," 70.
- <sup>44</sup> Ariel Mamani, "El Equipaje Del Destierro. Exilio, Diáspora y Resistencia de La Nueva Canción Chilena (1973-1981)," 2013, 14.
- <sup>45</sup> Ariel Mamani, "El Equipaje Del Destierro," 16.
- <sup>46</sup> Mamani, 17.
- <sup>47</sup> Mamani, 17.
- <sup>48</sup> Ariel Mamani, "El Equipaje Del Destierro. Exilio, Diáspora y Resistencia de La Nueva Canción Chilena (1973-1981)," 2013, 18.
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- <sup>50</sup> Miguel Mostrador, "El asesinato de Jaime Guzmán pudo ser digitado," *El Mostrador*, September 8, 2010, <https://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/pais/2010/09/08/%e2%80%9cel-asesinato-de-jaime-guzman-pudo-ser-digitado%e2%80%9d/>; Jorge Fuentes, "El atentado contra Pinochet que casi cambia la historia de Chile | Guioteca.com," *Guioteca.com* | Los 80 (blog), January 14, 2013, <https://www.guioteca.com/los-80/el-atentado-contra-pinochet-que-casi-cambia-la-historia-de-chile/>.
- <sup>51</sup> Toro, "La Música de Resistencia En La Dictadura Chilena," 16.
- <sup>52</sup> Los Prisioneros, *No Necesitamos Banderas*, La Voz de Los '80 (EMI, 1984).
- <sup>53</sup> Los Prisioneros, *Latinoamerica Es Un Pueblo al Sur de Estados Unidos*, La Voz de Los '80 (EMI, 1984).
- <sup>54</sup> Los Prisioneros, *La Voz de Los '80*, La Voz de Los '80 (EMI, 1984).
- <sup>55</sup> Vilches, "De Violeta Parra a Víctor Jara y Los Prisioneros: Recuperación de La Memoria Colectiva e Identidad Cultural a Través de La Música Comprometida," 205.
- <sup>56</sup> Los Prisioneros, *Por Qué No Se Van*, Pateando Piedras (EMI, 1986).
- <sup>57</sup> Los Prisioneros, *El Baile De Los Que Sobran*, Pateando Piedras (EMI, 1986).
- <sup>58</sup> Rodrigo Arrey, "Los Prisioneros: Entre La New Wave and Nueva Ola," 2020, 50.
- <sup>59</sup> Mamani, "El Equipaje Del Destierro. Exilio, Diáspora y Resistencia de La Nueva Canción Chilena (1973-1981)," 19.
- <sup>60</sup> Ariel Mamani, "El Equipaje Del Destierro. Exilio, Diáspora y Resistencia de La Nueva Canción Chilena (1973-1981)," 2013, 20–21.
- <sup>61</sup> Ariel Mamani, "El Equipaje Del Destierro," 23.
- <sup>62</sup> Daniela Nicole Pacheco Cuesta, "La Música Protesta Como Expresión de Resistencia No Violenta Frente a La Dictadura Chilena Entre 1973-1988," 2021, 40–41.
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<sup>66</sup> Correa and Florencia Doray.

<sup>67</sup> Pacheco Cuesta, "La Música Protesta Como Expresión de Resistencia Noviolenta Frente a La Dictadura Chilena Entre 1973-1988.," 60.

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# Hot As Hell

The Cold War's Impact on Nation-  
Building in Former Indochina

*By Elina Ziehm*

## Introduction

"The Eastern world, it is explodin'. Violence flarin', bullets loadin'."<sup>1</sup> The Cold War in the former French colonies Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos – also known as "Indochina"- went beyond threats and tension through the Iron Curtain, including heavy international involvement and escalation of civil wars. Some wars remain present in the minds of today's Western society while others are forgotten or have never been discussed in depth. For example, the dramatic US loss of the Vietnam War has been discussed thoroughly by historians but the US intervention in Laos or the communist experiment of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia is one of the lesser studied topics, which despite that lesser focus, had crucial societal and political effects on these nations.

English-language historiography and the study of the Cold War has moved from an orthodox perspective prominent in the 1950s, which made the Soviets responsible for the Cold War, to a revisionist perspective in the 1960s that held American expansionism accountable, to the idea of an inevitability of the Cold War due to Soviet expansionism and US containment policies, namely post-revisionism from the 1990s onwards. However, what is often forgotten in this discussion is the effect of the Cold War on the newly decolonised nations, as well as the role they played in the struggle between the US and the USSR.<sup>2</sup> Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao societies had to undergo a hasty process of state formation and nation-building in order to keep up with the rapid international developments of the second half of the twentieth century.

Controlled by their coloniser, occupied by Japan during the Second World War, and subsequently independent between 1945 and 1960, the former colonies in Southeast Asia underwent different processes of decolonisation. Even so, they ended up trapped between interests on the frontiers of the Cold War powers.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, this essay discusses how Cold War interventions shaped postcolonial nation-building in French Indochina between 1945 and 1975. First, it considers the nature and aspects of Cold War interventions and its effects on the civil wars and political nation-building. Moreover, it stresses the impact of guerrilla groups and aid programs on the efforts of political and economic nation-building. Finally, with regards to cultural development and identity formation, it examines the role of ideological intervention and art. The essay concludes that the interventions of the Cold War powers made independent nation-building challenging, as they manipulated the development of postcolonial Indochina through aid and advice, which was an alibi to assert their interests and display their power in the Cold War struggle. However, it also observes that local politicians were not always victim to foreign intervention but sometimes instrumentalized foreign aid and tensions to assert their own interests. Nation-building as a main concept in this essay is used in partial accordance with the definition provided by Harris Mylonas in the Oxford Bibliographies. He defines nation-building as a structural process that interacts and interrelates with industrial, urban, and social development to achieve national integration.<sup>4</sup> As this essay focusses on newly established postcolonial states, nation-building also refers to the general creation

of a shared identity, integrated economy, and the establishment of an independent political system in a Cold War world order.

It is crucial to discuss the impact of the Cold War on nation-building as current global politics is still influenced and affected by the national identities, power dynamics and grievances of Southeast Asian countries that originate in the Cold War period. The young countries were shaped by the struggle between the US and USSR which reached beyond the scope of the anticlimactic competition in Europe between the Communist and Capitalist ideology of the two power blocs commonly imagined by Western society. This essay only focuses on the former French colonies Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as their interdependency before and during the Cold War allows for a comparative approach. Moreover, the focus enables an in-depth analysis rather than a listing of events.

## Historical Background

The geographical areas that are today referred to as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam had been gradually colonized by France from being a protectorate in 1862 to the formation of the Indochinese Union in 1887. During the Japanese occupation in WW2, from 1940 to 1945, France was driven out of the region but returned after Japan's defeat. Though they were eager to continue the colonial administration, it was met with opposition from the local population. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, leader of the communist Viet Minh, that fought against the Japanese occupation during WW2, declared Vietnam's independence in 1945. Yet, this was not accepted by France and a civil war between France and the Viet Minh

broke out. After eight years of guerrilla warfare, the French were defeated in the final battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the Geneva accords were signed that granted independence to the French colony Indochina. However, Vietnam was split along the 17th parallel, leaving the North under Viet Minh control and the South governed by the Catholic, pro-US Ngo Diem Dinh. After the first civil war, most members of the Viet Minh living in the South were relocated to the North, yet some remained. From 1955, Diem tried to extinguish the last members through killings, imprisonments, and resettlement, leading to increased tensions with the North and general social unrest. By the beginning of 1957, occasional violent protests by farmers developed into an organised rebellion movement that was from 1959 onwards supported by guerrillas from the North through the Ho Chi Minh path.<sup>5</sup> This infamous path was a secret supply route of the communist guerrillas through the forests along the border regions in Cambodia and Laos connecting North and South Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> The "red fear" of the US caused its deep involvement in the civil war which will be discussed in depth. After almost two decades of warfare, the US retreated from the region in 1975 and left behind destructed land from bombings with the chemical "agent orange" and about 3 million deaths.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to Vietnam, Lao nationalists called 'Lao Issara [Free Laos]' declared independence of Laos in 1945.<sup>8</sup> Differently, they were defeated by French troops that re-established a colonial administration in 1946 but declared Lao an independent state within the French Union from 1949. Yet, another nationalist group known as Pathet Lao declared full independence and

occupied the northern regions of Laos in 1953 with the support of about 40.000 Viet Minh troops. Hence, Lao forces were also involved in the Vietnamese war against France, known as the first Indochina war. Subsequently, Laos was also given independence in 1954 during the Geneva conference.<sup>9</sup> In the years after decolonization, Laos underwent several government changes that were manipulated by Soviet, Chinese and US interests which will be discussed in depth at a later point. At the beginning of the 1960s, the tensions within the country escalated into a civil war after a coup by the communists and counter-coup by the right-wing Royal Lao Army. Trying to prevent further escalation, Laos was declared a neutral country in a 1961 Geneva conference. Yet, the Pathet Lao remained supporters of the Viet Minh during the Vietnam war along the Ho Chi Minh trail, leading to a secret bombing campaign conducted by the US from 1964-1973 that aimed at diminishing the trail in Laos.<sup>10</sup>

Cambodia's path to independence was overall less violent than Vietnam's or Lao's. With the French return in 1945, Cambodia became an independent state in the French Union with French control over its economic output and international participation with Prince Sihanouk as head of government.<sup>11</sup> However, with the release of nationalist Son Ngoc Thanh from exile, the communist group Khmer Issarak was formed which launched minor undertakings to disrupt French colonial activities on the Thai border.<sup>12</sup> Trying to maintain popular support, Sihanouk announced in 1952 that Cambodia would be independent from France within three years. After gaining independence in 1954, Sihanouk fully took

power in Cambodia until he was overthrown by US-backed Lon Nol in a coup in 1970.<sup>13</sup> During his administration, Sihanouk aimed at neutrality of Cambodia for the sake of international integration and economic development. However, the secret US bombing campaign 'Operation Menu' heavily disrupted the country, which will be discussed in depth further into this essay.<sup>14</sup> To summarize, the independence movement was a transnational project from the start, with foreign intervention that shaped developments crucial to nation building.

## Escalation of Civil Wars through International Involvement

The civil wars of the post-colonial period were escalated by the Cold War powers. This had crucial impacts on the ability of independent nation-building due to the general instability caused by chaos and social division exacerbated by international intervention. Particularly the Vietnam war is often perceived as simply a proxy war between the Cold War powers. However, Clemens Six, proposes to move away from this assumption and interpret the Cold War dynamics in Asia as a radicalising and intensifying force to pre-existing local conflicts.<sup>15</sup> Looking at the decolonisation conflict, also known as the first Indochina war from 1946-1954, it can be observed that involvement by the USA and the Communist Bloc caused an escalation of the colonial conflict fought by the Viet Minh, Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak against the French colonial administration.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the US supported president Ngo Dinh Diem in his campaign to eliminate his opponents and Viet Minh sympathisers that led to the infamous "Vietnam war", the second civil

war in the region in which the US was heavily involved.<sup>17</sup> The same can be observed in Cambodia where the US provided aid to Lon Nol in his efforts to drive Vietnamese communists out of the country, and his armed struggle against the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian communists.<sup>18</sup> Six's thesis and the examples show that the Cold War powers were heavily involved in the civil wars and escalated them through their involvement. Particularly the US's involvement was motivated by anti-communism as they backed the allegedly anti-communist camps.

In Laos, international involvement did not only escalate the civil war but also impacted Lao's creation of a national identity significantly, as it further divided the country. In his book *Secularism, Decolonisation, and the Cold War in South and Southeast Asia*, Six uses Lao's multiethnicity as an example of a more nuanced idea that positions the Cold War as a radicalising and intensifying force for pre-existing tensions in history.<sup>19</sup> After all, different from Vietnam and Cambodia, Laos did not fit into the definition of a nation-state: it was multi-ethnic, 90% of its population rural by the time of decolonisation in 1954 and about 50% of its inhabitants did not know the name of the land they lived on. Their identity was instead based on the tribe they belonged to, making the creation of a shared national identity difficult.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, according to Dewi Resminingayu, the different parties were influenced by the Cold War ideologies which divided the population further.<sup>21</sup> For example in the 1950s, US, Soviet and Chinese interests backed leftist, right-wing and moderate political groups in Laos, trying to enforce their interests. This led to

continued attempts at coalition governments which were eventually overthrown throughout the decade and the tensions developed into a civil war from 1962.<sup>22</sup> Six and Resminingayu are correct in interpreting Laos as an example of Cold War involvement that led to a civil war, however, they overlook the root cause of the local tensions: The Eurocentric idea of 'Nation State' that forced newly decolonised states which were multi-ethnic and decentralized into a particular political system, a centralized, sovereign state. Therefore, Laos does not only showcase the assertion of Cold War power interests leading to a civil war but also the Western idea of nation states as the only possible way of government and state formation.

In addition to the escalation of the civil wars, the US bombing campaigns caused destruction of land and human capital, vital to economic growth. Frey states that extensive bombing campaigns weakened the already struggling economies further and caused famines, internal displacement and a refugee crisis which delayed and interfered with the chance at a successful nation-building progress.<sup>23</sup> To exemplify, in South Vietnam, 9,000 out of 15,000 villages, millions of hectares of farmland and forest were harmed or destroyed, and 1.5 million cattle were killed. Moreover, the war resulted in 1.5 million military and civilian deaths, 362,000 invalids, and 900,000 orphans, as well as an exodus of about one million refugees by 1982.<sup>24</sup> In Cambodia, the secret bombings of 'Operation Menu' destroyed the border lands that were vital in agricultural production and caused an internal displacement. Operation Barrel Roll, which was aimed at fighting the communist Pathet Lao as well as preventing exchange



via the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, had similar effects.<sup>25</sup> This not only shows that the US caused destruction in the civil war but can be interpreted as a display of power, to portray capitalism as superior to communism in the arms race of the Cold War. Most importantly, the excessive bombing campaigns were part of their ultimate goal of diminishing communism. Thus, US involvement was not exclusively to aid the interests of the allied groups but also part of their own affairs.

## The Formation and Role of Guerrilla Groups in Cold War Interventions

Even though the strong international involvement prolonged and intensified the conflicts, it allowed for the formation of political and ideological groups in Indochina and thereby for the creation of a political and ideological landscape in the formation of independent states. Scholars Yangwen Zheng and Hong Liu argue that Southeast Asians adapted the Cold War ideologies – communism versus capitalism – and created their own interpretations that inspired the formation of local movements.<sup>26</sup> Especially during the decolonisation struggle, guerrilla groups formed which would have crucial impact on nation-building.

The Viet Minh were formed in 1941 and led by the Indochinese Communist Party that demanded independence after Japan was defeated – and which France denied,<sup>27</sup> escalating into the “First Indochina war”. In the past it has been argued by historians that Vietnam was pushed into the Communist Bloc due to their need for protection and US failure to support them in the early 1950s.

This argument implies the weakness of newly decolonised states and their need for a protective partner in international relations. As the US apparently failed to provide this stability, the argument stresses that Vietnam turned to the other hegemon, the USSR and with it, communism. However, based on newly released material from Vietnamese archives, Tuong Vu and Wansa Wongsurawant claim that the communist ideology spread to Indochina through Vietnamese efforts as they genuinely believed in the ideas of communism.<sup>28</sup> Due to the negative experiences during colonization and domination during French and later Japanese occupation, communist ideology of empowering the working class and anti-imperialism appealed to the anti-colonialists in Vietnam, thus forming the Communist Party of Vietnam in the 1930s. Communism spread from Vietnam to the rest of Southeast Asia through migration, and Vietnam, along with China, became one of the largest diffusers of communism in the region.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the aid from the Communist Bloc allowed for the communist ideology to expand to regions in Laos and Cambodia where they created communist “resistance” groups, such as the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak, which set the foundation for later communist movements.<sup>30</sup>

After the Geneva conference in 1954 that divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel, the Viet Minh took political control over North Vietnam and also supported the ‘National Liberation Front’ (NLF) – commonly known as the Viet Cong – in the South through the ‘Ho Chi Minh path’.<sup>31</sup> The NLF was formed in response to the anti-communist insurgencies undertaken by Diem and his US supporters.<sup>32</sup> This implies that US

involvement caused the formation of a protest movement that divided the nation and ultimately led to the "Vietnam war". The ultimate success of the communist insurgencies in the civil wars would heavily contribute to the nation-building programs post 1975.<sup>33</sup> For example, in Laos, the colonial opposition became a crucial part of the national history during the Pathet Lao regime and the former leaders were celebrated as national heroes.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, even though some ideologies such as capitalism in South Vietnam were forced upon the newly decolonised nations, other political ideologies such as communism in Vietnam inspired their political nation-building programs and the creation of a political identity.

However, US officials believed that the formation of guerrilla groups was caused by poverty and economic weakness. They based this assumption on the modernisation theory which heavily impacted their involvement in Indochina. Weber's modernization theory, adapted by economists and social scientists in the 1950s and 60s, distinguished between 'backward' and 'advanced' regions with the US as the 'summit of modernity', hence it was the US's duty to support the 'backward', 'Third World'.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), founded in 1961, provided development funds to increase development towards modernity such as agricultural and infrastructural improvement and contain the spread of communism. This conclusion resonated with the US orthodoxy which argued that the agrarian revolts were initiated by "communist-oriented leaders of the genuine grievances of a rural, backward population" and

through gaining their 'hearts and minds', which will be discussed in more depth later, resistance against the "communist threat" could be achieved.<sup>36</sup> At the heart of this idea is the belief in superiority and notions of racism with which not only the US but also the USSR – with its comprehensive wariness of Asian communist movements – approached the intervention in former Indochina.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, US involvement was based on a social theory that further supported the belief in superiority and strength of their system.

## Development Aid and Its Effects on Economic Development

While Cold War powers were responsible for destruction and instability through military interventions, they simultaneously tried to support economic nation-building through aid and funds. Prompted by the modernisation theory discussed in the former paragraph, the US supported South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia with large amounts of development aid. USAID built infrastructure, financed commercialisation, and created agricultural cooperatives to boost the economy with about US\$2 billion aid in South Vietnam between 1955-1962.<sup>38</sup> Laos and Cambodia were also given funds and aid but to a lesser extent than South Vietnam.<sup>39</sup> As tensions in the region continued – despite the large amounts of aid – scholars shifted away from modernization theory towards relative deprivation theory. Developed in the 1960s it suggested that the 'feeling of relative economic deprivation' caused a frustration among the population which motivated them to revolt.<sup>40</sup> As for Soviet aid, Carlyle Thayer argues that it was rather limited during the Khrushchev period from 1953 to

1964, but economic and military aid increased during the Brezhnev period, 1964-1982, trying to increase Russia's influence in the Region due to Sino-Soviet tensions in the 1960s.<sup>41</sup> The increasing power of China transformed the Soviet-US bipolarity into a 'Cold War Strategic Triangle'.<sup>42</sup> Besides deepening ideological disputes and territorial claims, competition over influence in the 'Third World' further strained the relationship.<sup>43</sup> North Vietnam as well as Cambodia and Laos received funds and support from the Communist Bloc. North Vietnam, for example, received a total of \$832 million of which \$452 million were in credits between 1955 and 1965 from the USSR and China.<sup>44</sup> Soviet aid supported various projects such as 17 electric power projects, broadcasting stations and an anti-malaria campaign.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, during the Lao civil war in the 1950s, the Kong Lae, supported by the Pathet Lao, were sustained by Soviet airlifts containing fuel, ammunition and food.<sup>46</sup> This shows that the aid given was not necessarily out of generosity but rather as a means to sustain the forces that fought for the respective ideology of either side or prevent the groups from changing sides. Cambodia on the other hand with its policy of non-alignment under Sihanouk did not receive direct aid, however, it was supported by large international investment in infrastructure. Through donations from both sides, megaprojects in the transportation sector could be undertaken. Ultimately, the aid allowed for the newly created nations to invest in projects and integrate into the global economy but also to continue fighting their civil wars as part of their state-building process.

Conversely, the large amounts of aid made the newly founded nations heavily reliant on

their benefactors which ultimately had destabilising effects. Cambodia saw some economic growth under the rule of Prince Sihanouk, yet it primarily exported primary produce such as rice and rubber. With the removal of protective tariffs in 1969, the economy was hit hard –Sokty Chhair and Luyna Ung describe it as being similar to the economy after decolonisation in 1954.<sup>47</sup> This implies that national institutions were not able to absorb the development aid in a sustainable manner, which ultimately led to dependence. Additionally, the aid could not protect the fragile economies from external factors. North Vietnam struggled greatly due to natural disasters that decreased the agricultural output. Moreover, it had difficulties with balance of payments which could not be solved through foreign aid.<sup>48</sup> Another essential aspect was the government's reliance on the aid and strength of their benefactor for its power and control. This became evident in 1975, with the surrender of the South Vietnamese army shortly after the US had left the conflict.<sup>49</sup> In the same year, the Khmer Republic, heavily reliant on US power, collapsed soon after US withdrawal from the region.<sup>50</sup> Similar to Cambodia, the US-supported Royal Lao Army imploded after the US left the region and was replaced by the Pathet Lao.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, aid caused a heavy dependence of the governments and led to instability when absent. It also reflects the substantial control and political power the US had had in the region. It was not only an advisor or benefactor but a regent that controlled weaker puppet regimes.

## Development Aid and Its Effects on Economic Development

Besides military and economic interventions

whose benefits for nation-building were questionable, the USSR and US also tried to shape the identity formation and political nation-building of the newly decolonised nations. With the control gained from Indochinese dependence on aid and advisory, the Cold War powers tried to immobilise or support the guerrilla movements and intervened in political nation-building. In South Vietnam, the US installed the US-backed, anti-French Ngo Dinh Diem in 1956 after prohibiting nationwide elections in fear of a communist victory. Despite the large amounts of aid and supervisors the US provided for nation-building, the opposite was achieved. As the majority of South Vietnam were rural Buddhist peasants, the policies of the well-educated Catholic Diem alienated rather than unified. Thus, the involvement of the US prevented elections that could have reunified Vietnam and thereby an action crucial to political nation-building. This implies that the national interests of the US outweighed the national interests of South Vietnam, and the US abused their influence to prevent the spread of communism rather than support the creation of a newly decolonised nation. By 1963, the US perceived Diem as a burden and backed a coup to overthrow him, which demonstrates that heavy US involvement complicated the establishment of national sovereignty, crucial to postcolonial nation-building.<sup>52</sup>

In comparison, in Cambodia, US involvement was more indirect than in Vietnam but still had a significant impact on political nation-building. In 1970, the national assembly of Cambodia voted 86-3 to remove Sihanouk from power and the US-backed Khmer Republic under anti-

communist Prime Minister Lon Nol was created.<sup>53</sup> While the US denies its involvement, Sihanouk himself accused the CIA of initiating this coup, yet, his accusations were not taken seriously due to a lack of evidence.<sup>54</sup> However, Hersh argues Sihanouk's removal from power has been of US interest and claims there is evidence that Lon Nol had been approached by the CIA in 1969.<sup>55</sup> This is another example of the US's actions to establish their own interests without respect to national sovereignty.

Similar to Cambodia, the US was heavily involved in Laos' domestic politics. Even though the communist party had the majority in the national assembly in the 1958 elections, Channapha Khamvongsa and Elaine Russell claim the US installed more US-friendly leaders by withholding aid until they were in power. Moreover, they stress the 1960 elections were rigged by the US through an increase in aid and buying of votes.<sup>56</sup> The USSR's involvement also remained present –Cheng Guan Ang describes the Soviet support during the 'Laotian crisis' as a means of gaining political influence through diplomatic relations desired by Moscow in the context of the Sino-Soviet rivalry.<sup>57</sup> This illustrates that Cold War powers disregarded national sovereignty and involved themselves in domestic politics which led to a decrease in sovereignty and national independence. Moreover, it shows the lack of political legitimacy that puppet states suffered from. Unsurprisingly, this had crucial impact on political stability and the establishment of independent governments on a national level.

Moreover, the Cold War powers had significant influence on diplomatic relations.

Ang observed that the 1954 Geneva Conference exposed the dynamics inside the communist brotherhood, which were ultimately assertions of national interests, visible in Moscow's pressure to settle the war early instead of continuing to fight for unification.<sup>58</sup> This implies that Cold War powers influenced international diplomatic decisions by undermining the newly established nations in an international setting. Another example of international involvement in foreign policies is the Geneva conference in 1961-1962. Despite the fear of "losing Laos to communism", the US – based on a Soviet proposal – engaged thirteen other countries in negotiations at the conference to end the escalating civil war in Laos.<sup>59</sup> After a year of negotiation, Laos was declared a neutral country and all foreign troops had to be removed, preventing an armed struggle fuelled by the USSR, China and the US.<sup>60</sup> Thus, tensions between the hegemonic states influenced not only Laos' domestic but also its foreign policy, forcing it to neutrality. The involvement of fourteen countries in the conference illustrates the historiographic perspective that Asia cannot be analysed through a single Cold War narrative but is part of a complex and interconnected network of events and actions on a global level. Scholars increasingly acknowledge that the Cold War developments in the "Third World" were not 'sideshows to the main event' but vital events of the Cold War itself.

Driven by their ideologies, the Cold War powers aimed at influencing cultural nation-building of the "uncommitted Third World" through propaganda programs. Zheng and Hong Lui argue that the global ideological competition was interrelated with the

establishment of Asian nationalism.<sup>61</sup> For example, the US spread propaganda material such as pamphlets among the population that depicted the American system as a means to freedom and democracy and communism as subversive and hegemonic.<sup>62</sup> Most impactfully was the creation of a "strategic hamlet program" that consisted of the displacement and isolation of entire villages into "agrovilles" in order to create a new sense of nationalism as a basis for nation-building. Moreover, they believed the prevention of communist influence would allow for a bond to be built between the Diem regime and the population. In 1960, Cyril Falls described the project as 'the most mammoth example of social engineering in the non-Communist world'. However, 46 years later, Latham argues the project was a failure from the very beginning as nation-building could not be achieved in an oppressive environment.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, Latham's claim proved to be correct. However, to come to this conclusion, the Vietnamese population had to suffer through manipulation and internal displacement because of a social experiment conducted by an outside power, that aimed at asserting its interests for the sake of an ideological battle.

In the opposing bloc, China emerged as a dominant power that conducted propaganda operations in Indochina. Its propaganda emphasised 'unity of friendly and peaceful nations' and was distributed through the same means and with the same aims as the US.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, the propaganda missions of the two opposing powers led to a cultural warfare that was fought on the backs of the newly decolonised nations in the region.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the Cold War interventions affected the creation of a national identity

through dissemination of propaganda and social engineering.

However, local actors also used the Cold War tensions and aid to their own benefit. In 2009, Vu and Wongsurawat argued that nationalists manipulated the blocs to secure development aid for their nation-building programs.<sup>66</sup> For example, the alliances with the communist camp enabled and inspired the Viet Minh to undertake social, cultural, agricultural, economic, political, and military reforms that would create a basis for the newly envisioned state during the decolonisation war.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Vietnam made use of the Sino-Soviet tensions and competition over influence in the 'Third World'.<sup>68</sup> Hanoi did not align itself with Moscow or Beijing but received aid from both.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the competition between China and the USSR was used as a tactical scheme by Vietnam rather than a burden on domestic politics. This example follows the historiographical notion of placing Vietnam not simply as a 'proxy' but analysing its impact on the course of the Cold War.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, according to Robert Horn, the assumption that 'Third World' states were controlled by the USSR is not appropriate to the Soviet policies in Indochina. He goes further claiming the USSR's dependence on local developments and policies has limited its ability to influence but rather obligated Moscow to amend its influence in reaction to local developments.<sup>71</sup> This argument is another example of the historiographical trend discussed in the former example.

In regards to neutral Cambodia, Sihanouk did not align himself with any of the powers but played them against each other to secure benefits such as aid or investment.<sup>72</sup>

This resonates with a study from 1969 that dismissed the 'hearts and minds' approach as well as development aid, arguing that local players had economic interests and rebellion was a rational choice, a means to an end.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the assumption that former Indochina was trapped and powerless between the Cold War powers has been dismissed by historians who point out that the hegemony was manipulated by the local actors and Cold War tensions were exploited. Even though the Cold War powers had significant control over the governments and groups as demonstrated, local actors ultimately influenced the decision-making of the US and USSR, and with it the course of the Cold War. The development of the conflict was not only influenced by external power but an interplay between external and internal forces.

## The Role of Artistic Movements in Identity Formation

In order to get a deeper understanding of the cultural developments, this last section briefly discusses the effects of the Cold War on artistic movements. This essay focuses on visual art as a reflection of cultural influences because art and national identity are closely related.<sup>74</sup> Art can be a representation of ideologies, revealing the degree of patriotism, censorship and freedom of speech.<sup>75</sup> However, this section should serve as a brief analysis that should be expanded upon in further research. Yet it can be argued that the Cold War ideologies significantly shaped the creation of art within the newly founded nations. After the division in 1954, artistic movements in North and South Vietnam differed greatly. While North Vietnamese art was censored and

pushed towards a socialist ideology, artists in Saigon had more opportunity for artistic expression. According to Liem and Day, artistic diversity was absent in North Vietnam and dominated by socialist realism that romanticised labour and industrialization that followed Soviet and Chinese examples.<sup>76</sup> Regarding South Vietnam, they argue that the art community aimed at remaining apolitical and Cold War tensions were excluded from their work. However, a young artist movement in Saigon depicted the ongoing war as a civil war with Vietnam's "true destiny" being restrained by the intervention of the Cold War powers.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, Vietnamese art from this period can be interpreted as a depiction of the different ideological systems and their impact on national identity formation.

On the contrary, art movements in Cambodia depicted the neutralising efforts and 'revitalisation of ancient glory' by prince Sihanouk. During the colonial period, Cambodian art was forced into stagnant and traditional handcraft. However, with decolonisation, Sihanouk encouraged reformation of Cambodian culture inspired by the "hearts and minds" programs of both Cold War powers. By the 1960s, Khmer art combined traditional subjects such as Angkor temples or rural women with notions of a "modern Cambodia". Yet the influence of Cold War powers was visible in movies: many of the main characters explored the presence of Soviet/Chinese or US propaganda.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, the competing Cold War ideologies shaped cultural expression and dominated some artistic movements in Indochina. The historiographical shift from the reductionist perspective that dichotomized between East and West to a

less Eurocentric approach can be observed. Instead of applying an either/or perspective, the case of Cambodia and Vietnam illustrates that Southeast Asians developed their own interpretations of the ideologies they were confronted with, shaping the creation of their national identity.<sup>79</sup> However, this conclusion is based on a secondary research and to gain a better analysis and understanding of the impact of the Cold War on art it would be necessary to conduct a primary research with an in-depth analysis of specific artistic works. Moreover, it could also be valuable for the analysis to work beyond the discussed timeframe in this essay and look at long-term developments pre- and post the Cold War to gain an understanding of the role of identity in arts in the respective cultures.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the Cold War influenced nation-building in Indochina on a political, economic, and cultural level. The way in which Cold War powers intervened in the newly formed states differed in some respects while it corresponded in others. The US interventions based on the modernisation theory led to economic aid as well as propaganda missions to influence the opinion of the local population. Economic aid was crucial to the establishment of a national economy and creation of a political system. However, in Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam, the US used aid to create a dependency on which to install regimes and administrations that acted in their interest. This led to the US undermining domestic sovereignty and diplomatic relations. In North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Communist Bloc also interfered with aid and propaganda in the nation-building process of the newly formed

states, causing them to be trapped between the opposing ideologies and exacerbating civil wars. Moreover, the tensions within the Communist Bloc shaped the intervention of China and the USSR due to competition over influence in the region. Ultimately, the Cold War powers used the unstable situation of the newly formed states to assert their control and interests. However, the tensions, particularly competition between the hegemonic powers, were instrumentalized by national regimes for their own nation-building programs.

In regard to the historiographical interpretation of the Cold War in Asia, the shift away from Eurocentrism had crucial impacts on the way in which the region is studied. Historians are beginning to analyse the local players as influential parts of the Cold War struggle going beyond the idea of the Cold War being a bipolar conflict. Instead of seeing the newly decolonised states as victims or proxies of the USSR and US, scholars have started to realise that the most important aspects of the Cold War were not of military or strategic nature but concerned the political and social development of newly decolonised nations. To gain deeper insight into the effects of the Cold War on nation-building, it would be useful to conduct primary research on today's societies and their social, economic, and political structures in the respective nations. This would allow an insight into the long-term effects of the interventions and the ways in which they shaped national identity and political systems.

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<sup>6</sup> Frey, *Die Geschichte des Vietnamkriegs*, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Frey, *Die Geschichte des Vietnamkriegs*, 233.

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<sup>12</sup> Trude Jacobsen, *Cambodia and the West, 1500-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 116.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobsen, *Cambodia and the West*, 116-119.

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<sup>2</sup> Yangwen Zheng, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi, *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.



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- <sup>24</sup> Frey, *Die Geschichte des Vietnamkriegs*, 233.
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# **We Forgot How to Future**

The Neoliberal Destruction of Great  
Works

*By W.E. Dung*

## Introduction

Four decades into its global regime, neoliberalism has proven to be a destructive force. Environmentalists contend that it destroys pre-existing social relations and values governing environmental concerns, replacing the commons and the 'local' with only the concerns of the global market.<sup>1</sup> Social controls under neoliberalism were designated obsolete and superseded by state regulation, but because the neoliberal state is itself totally subordinated to the self-regulating market, state regulation proved existentially unable (that is, unwilling) to preserve the environment against the market. Species, spaces, and values were obliterated or made endangered under neoliberal projects. But also, world neoliberalization has attended a widespread psychic apocalypse—a defoliation of once verdant forests of ideas. 'We-feeling' ideas (solidarity, community) were especially targeted for destruction by neoliberal leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher who declared that there should ideally be "no such thing as society, only individual men and women."<sup>2</sup> Western market democracy sees itself as the culmination of the evolution of ideas heralding the "end of history", but by designating itself as the universal, as the very 'end', all other futures are abolished.<sup>3</sup> There is no progression beyond this end—that is, no alternative system to neoliberalism in the future. Future-imagining, world-shaping, and transformative change have been cast aside. This constriction of the horizons of possibility has deeply affected discursive understandings of what is 'doable', that is, what is possible under neoliberalism.<sup>4</sup> This is the neoliberal destruction of 'Great Works',

both in mind and in practice. Great Works here are a catch-all term for large-scale physical or organizational projects deemed monumental, transformational, aspirational, or, especially, futurist.

What follows will argue this point by tracing the historical context of Great Works from prehistory to the high modern era of the twentieth century. The end of Great Works in the West will be identified as occurring simultaneously with the end of the global high modern era—that is, the fall of the USSR and the ascendancy of neoliberalism in the West. Examples of abortive Great Works under neoliberalism will clarify the general relation between neoliberalism, futurities, and Great Works. And finally, extensive Great Works projects in China, outside the neoliberal order, will support the argument that Great Works should or can be undertaken at all in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, Great Works may be a necessary vehicle for repairing global environmental harm. It is then arguable that neoliberalism, which does not permit Great Works, should be abandoned for something else entirely for the sake of environmental concerns. An intrinsic ideational gap within our current world order presents a significant obstacle to change.

## Futures past and present

Great Works are monumental engineering projects which lead to transformative outcomes.<sup>5</sup> They are a means of shaping the future of a society. A Great Work is sometimes represented in a physical object such as the Aswan Dam in Egypt, but more often a Great Work is a comprehensive state program such as the Great Leap Forward in China or the New Deal in the United States

of America.<sup>6</sup> The undertaking of Great Works reached a zenith in the twentieth century with programs like these. But Great Works have long been a feature of human endeavor since the beginning of the Anthropocene—the current geologic age which has been characterized by human environmental transformation. Early humans of the Anthropocene shaped their environment with systematic and wholesale deployment of fire.<sup>7</sup> This was also the case with Aboriginal Australians up to the nineteenth century. Their continent was their Great Work. Australia was observed by the first European colonizers to be akin to parkland, with carefully ordered areas of woodland and grassland—clearly bounded yet unfenced and held in commons—each space manicured like a manor's grounds, with the undergrowth kept back by Aboriginal fire techniques.<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal Australians fostered animal and plant species in different spaces in a careful husbandry organized according to climatic, ecological, and human needs in concert. For example, they planted sweet-tasting grasses in one area to draw the grazing kangaroo away from human-desired wild grains in another area.<sup>9</sup> On a continental scale, woodland (of evenly-spaced trees) was grown or allowed to remain on poor soil, then cleared away with fire on productive soil so as to make room for yams, grains, and grasses.<sup>10</sup> This was possible because of a continent-spanning constellation of autonomous but deeply relationally entwined societies. Aboriginal Australians' rationale for undertaking such ecological transformations was derived from their belief that each highly autonomous individual had obligations to every other individual, including towards the land itself which was imbued with personhood.<sup>11</sup>

Parkland Australia is a prime example of humans undertaking a process of large-scale transformative change of their environment. Elsewhere, for millennia prior to the rise of the centralized Inca Empire, indigenous Andeans reshaped whole mountain ranges by constructing stone terraces across the slopes, turning the arid into the arable.<sup>12</sup> This kind of world-shaping—constructing a new present and therefore a certain envisioned future—is central to the Great Work.

The twentieth century was an era of rampant futurities—born of ideologies and aesthetics obsessed with a near tomorrow—and not coincidentally it was also an era of wild, runaway engineering projects, of Great Works unleashed. Assisted by a scientific industrial state apparatus, the scale of Great Works as planned by state authorities exploded beyond what was previously thought possible. These were projects shaped not by metis or local knowledge as with Australian or Andean Great Works, but rather they were a 'top-down' imposition of the state seeking to deliver a future of material prosperity according to rational scientific and technological planning.<sup>13</sup> This social engineering by universal scientific principles was a defining feature of high modernism, a framework of authoritarian state behavior throughout the twentieth century. Under high modernism, the state was but one more Great Work—a Great Work which itself enacted others. High modernism, the state, and Great Works all blurred together into a singular program with a united aim towards reconstituting society and nature.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) project of the New Deal (from 1933) was an



example of state rationalization of society and nature on a regional scale. At the time, the Tennessee Valley was a benighted river basin region whose population suffered underdevelopment, poor health, and a devastated natural environment. The TVA brought a utopian vision of science to the region to solve these problems. Dams were built along the river basin which provided electricity to the local population and further provided the foundations for industry and mechanized agriculture. Rural populations were forcibly relocated via eminent domain and trained in the methods of large-scale twentieth century agriculture, such as using chemical fertilizers and pesticides.<sup>14</sup> According to a later assessment of the TVA's goals, the TVA aimed to reach "deeply into peoples' lives to transform where and how they lived and worked, and how they saw the world".<sup>15</sup> This was a deeply high modernist Great Work which sought to reorder the natural, the social, and the psychic. But the high modernist excesses of this style of socialistic state intervention were stymied by weak United States federal institutions.<sup>16</sup> The high modern ideology was present, but there lacked an authoritarian apparatus to totally enact it. The TVA ultimately required a public-private partnership which, rather than delivering the Tennessee Valley into a utopia of the future, opened the valley up to the markets of the present—the modernized agriculture was simply corporatized agriculture, the industries which moved into the region were capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive, and by the close of the twentieth century the TVA was only a profit-driven public utility company providing electricity to the region.<sup>17</sup> The destruction of a Great Work such as the TVA by its subordination to the market illustrates the

long arc of the Great Works of high modernism.

In the West, this style of high modernism was arrested by liberalism and later neoliberalism. The authoritarian ideological futurities of high modernism were countermanded by the universalizing dictates of the global market, as happened to an extent with the TVA. Meanwhile, in Soviet Russia, high modernism unleashed came to crumble under the sheer weight of its pretensions. At the end of the Soviet era in Russia, when high modernist state authoritarianism was plainly failing to deliver a materially prosperous future—in fact, the economy was in dire condition—a disillusionment with high modernity developed among Soviet Russians.<sup>18</sup> The whole of society understood that the state's discursive representations were false and hence their entire socially engineered society stood on evidently false pretenses. But because this was so existentially disruptive, anthropologist Alexei Yurchak contends that Soviet Russians simply accepted the false discourses as the new normal. They retreated into a kind of "dream world" in which the clearly false masquerades of the Great Works were simply 'how things were'—all because they themselves were so embedded in the Great Works that it was impossible to see any alternative.<sup>19</sup> No competing future presented itself, and so the future was abandoned in this process of "hypernormalization" of present crises.<sup>20</sup> The state concerned itself with maintaining the fragile images of the present in order to seem like it was still a functioning high modernist Great Work. This proved untenable. The Soviet collapse in 1991 heralded for many the ultimate demise of

high modernism and Great Works. Not just among Soviet Russians, but globally, it represented "the final failure of the dream that politics could be used to build a new kind of world".<sup>21</sup> Neoliberalism which purported to exist beyond politics was presented as the sole alternative.<sup>22</sup>

Defining neoliberalism—or classifying this or that scheme as essentially neoliberal—is fraught with problems. Neoliberalism manifests itself in various (sometimes competing) ideologies, discursive formations, institutions, and practices across time and space. It is more easily identified as the hegemonic program of the West in the current era. For the purposes of the following analysis, neoliberalism will be isolated as having a discrete period (circa 1980 to present) and discrete geography (the West, or Global North blocs—NAFTA and EEA countries).<sup>23</sup> In fact there is a far broader historical continuity and geographical remit than will be engaged with here. Neoliberalism is, in broadest terms, an ideology which demands the commodification of all goods and services in a society, opening all spheres public and private to a market-based mode of valuation.<sup>24</sup> Under neoliberalism, the worth of a thing, the meaning of a relationship, or the performance of an institution are understood according to market values. Everything is tied to the self-regulating market, which is normalized as some kind of objective, rational, technocratic natural force. Like high modernism, neoliberalism necessitates the reordering of a society's material, social, and especially psychic relations. But neoliberalism which desires the withering of the state, or indeed the withering of all things besides the holy market, is a stark opposite of high

modernism. Where high modernism is aspirational, utopian, futuristic, neoliberalism is restrained, calculating, concerned with the present only. Neoliberalism contains no conception of the future; the future is simply the next point on the trend line of the market. With this lack of futurity, and with it plainly visible that its objective rationality is a lie, neoliberalism comes with hypernormalization hard-coded into its framework. The ascendancy of neoliberalism in the United States attended the demise of optimistic visions of the future in American discourse. At the end of the twentieth century, the future contained nothing but nuclear annihilation for the American psyche—and even after the fall of the Soviet Union, a new kind of "dark foreboding" crept in which continues to this day, seeing in the future only runaway forces of violence (9/11, the War on Terror, zombies and the post-apocalypse) or climate catastrophe (Ozone depletion, rising sea levels, climate refugees, Contolism).<sup>25</sup>

This presents manifold problems. Central to neoliberalism's relation to Great Works is neoliberalism's lack of futurity. With no alternative future possible besides the limitless neoliberal present—and in fact nothing but nihilism to be offered by a future under neoliberalism—there is no possibility of transformative change. There is nothing to change in the neoliberal order, as the market is absolute and inarguable. Only tweaks are permitted, provided that the system itself is not threatened in the process. In other words, neoliberalism can never suffer a Great Work to live. In some cases, a Small Work or two may be permissible. Abortive attempts at Great Works under neoliberalism include Green New Deal legislation in the United States,

which even in its non-binding mandate (referring here to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's House Resolution 332 of the 117th Congress) was not seriously considered for enactment.<sup>26</sup> Others include a proposal to reintroduce gray whales to the Irish Sea by airlifting 50 individuals from the Pacific, an ambitious if monothematic Great Work reminiscent of parts of Aboriginal Australian world-shaping.<sup>27</sup> But this too did not come to pass. The airlift possessed no intrinsic market value and so it was viewed as preposterous. In observing the neoliberal status quo order, social scientist Ulrich Beck has pointed out that any politician who now proposes to take control away from the market and steer society towards a better future is viewed as dangerous.<sup>28</sup> The horizons of possibility are not just tightly constricted under neoliberalism, but they also present a seemingly impassable boundary. The social and environmental disruption of neoliberalism demands real, transformative change, however. Neoliberalism presents the greatest obstacle to solving the myriad crises of the twenty-first century. The veil of hypernormalization must be pierced and an alternative system which allows for Great Works must be sought to replace neoliberalism. One way forward into a more optimistic future is perhaps to look to the Chinese model of Great Works. China presents an example of Great Works undertaken in the twenty-first century, decades after the wane of high modernism. This potentially represents an ideational oasis where aspirational future projects still survive.

Quite differently from the neoliberal hypernormal status quo, the modern Chinese state is intrinsically futurist. The current state capitalism in China is one point

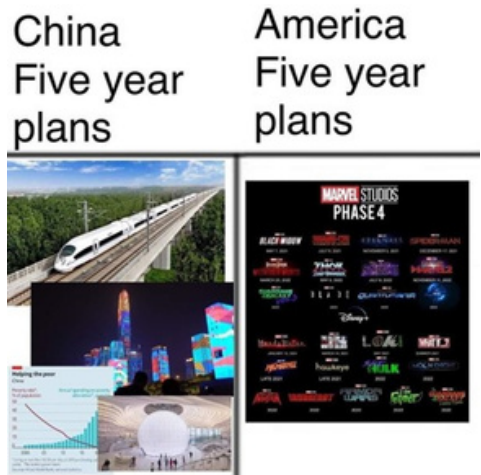


Figure 1. Discursive formation (meme) about Chinese versus United States futurities. Danny Haiphong (@SpiritofHo), "Where's the lie?", Twitter photo, January 16, 2022,

<https://twitter.com/SpiritofHo/status/1482706844334309379>.

on a journey towards full communism. All of Chinese society is conceived of as a transitory ordering, incipiently futurist. There is a discrete future that all of these Great Works are working towards.<sup>29</sup> The future is accordingly a deep existential concern of the Chinese system. The Chinese government constitutes a large authoritarian apparatus engaged in transformational programs of change—the state as its own Great Work, itself perpetuating Great Works. Government officials purport to always be reifying political and economic power, whether with anti-corruption drives as under Xi Jinping or market reforms as under Deng Xiaoping.<sup>30</sup> While the consequence in either instance is a more muscular authoritarianism, these and other measures represent a forward-thinking orientation. They are intended to effect the shedding of entrenched interests, which in Chinese discourse is understood to

be the problem with the United States—the US is captured by particular interests and has no recourse to fix that by reconstituting itself. This is also considered in China to have been the problem with the hypernormal USSR.<sup>31</sup> Despite Deng Xiaoping's introduction of markets to China—a neoliberalism by degrees—it cannot be said that China is neoliberal, if for no other reason than that its leaders do not take a *laissez-faire* attitude towards capital accumulation. Neither is there any academic basis for calling China a high modernist state.<sup>32</sup> What does recall high modernism, however, is China's myriad Great Works and the futures embedded within them.

A robust Chinese discipline of futures studies or futurology has seen rapid intellectual development since the start of the twenty-first century, producing a plethora of new ideas on the future. Where American discursive futures present literal wastelands, Chinese futurologists are optimistic about a Sinocentric future world of prosperity.<sup>33</sup> This is expressly a future with Chinese characteristics. In effect, the world's future is a Chinese future. Unlike the more cosmopolitan aspirations of futures studies elsewhere, the China Society for Futures Studies requires as part of its membership application that futurologists "ardently love the motherland", and the society's stated objective is to "build socialism".<sup>34</sup> Competing futures outside of Chinese officialdom (such as in the works of public intellectuals, science fiction novelists, and internet commentators) show a pervasiveness of discourses of the future in Chinese society, to such an extent that the future has become one of China's key exports.<sup>35</sup>

This can be seen in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure development initiative seeking to establish economic and cultural connections between African and Eurasian countries and China.<sup>36</sup> English-language government copy uses such terms as "transformation", "long-term", "for years to come", and "brighter future".<sup>37</sup> The BRI is expected to be completed by 2050, several decades hence. As a Great Work, it represents a program of transformative change intended to alter the very future by lifting millions out of poverty globally, along the way reconstituting Chinese international relations.<sup>38</sup> (An example of this relational restructuring already underway as a result of the BRI is the jokey aphorism "As a Kenyan official put it: Every time China visits we get a hospital, every time Britain visits we get a lecture."<sup>39</sup>) While these aspirations are self-evident, the unmitigated success of Belt and Road is less easy to grasp. Intensive Maritime Silk Road development in Sri Lanka has had a negative impact on local coasts, corals, and livelihoods of Sri Lankans, as well as fueling deforestation and pollution due to the mining needed by the development.<sup>40</sup> In China, the Great Green Wall is another Great Work, attempting to combat desertification by afforestation along 3,000 miles of marginal land.<sup>41</sup> This is world-shaping at a scale (geographic and temporal) beyond what is currently considered feasible in the neoliberal West. Western perspectives on the Great Green Wall are generally dismissive, pointing towards the program's use of monoculture plantation and its perceived inability to truly forestall desert encroachment.<sup>42</sup> In previous eras, control over nature signified a state's standard of civilizational attainment.<sup>43</sup> Today, states in the West seem powerless or

unwilling to contend with the runaway forces of the natural world, such as wildfires, epidemics, and flooding. With neoliberal societies devoted to the maintenance of the market masquerade, there has grown a fatalistic nihilism concerning the environment, if not a total structural unwillingness to address its myriad issues.<sup>44</sup> With no structural solutions in sight, many people are forced to seek individualistic solutions and hope in vain that they form, in aggregate, some kind of Great Work.<sup>45</sup> These occurrences under neoliberalism are inseparable from the system itself.

Horizons of possibility are tightly constricted under neoliberalism, whose ethos represents a death of futures. In comparison, in Chinese structures and discourse, there are futures aplenty. The Chinese state accordingly is able to conceive of ambitious long-term projects and implement them as Great Works, whereas a 'market values'-based paralysis in the West prevents Great Works from ever being attempted there. While it may seem that a modern authoritarian state is the only way to enact Great Works at a scale necessary to address irreparable environmental harm, this need not be the case. Prehistoric Great Works in the Andes and Australia exceeded the scale and ambition of Chinese Great Works and were demonstrably successful. To look towards alternative modes—whether Chinese, authoritarian, local, indigenous, or otherwise—is required in order to move the horizons of possibility under neoliberalism.

## Towards future futurities

This modern age which has followed the wholesale rejection of high modernism

does not presuppose an outright abolishing of the future. Nor does modernity necessarily require a constriction of possibilities as occurs under neoliberalism. Whether successful or not, that China attempts future-oriented monumental projects is evidence enough that some societies have retained discourses of futurity in spite of neoliberal globalization forces. Possibilities of transformational change exist outside of the neoliberal order. It serves to look to China not for authoritarian solutions, but for methods of preserving future-building and grand-scale possibilities in popular discourse. These discursive ideas will naturally inform which programs a state considers feasible (such as Great Works).

For true transformative change to occur in the world which would repair the damage wrought by destructive capitalist production, hypernormalized neoliberalism must be replaced with another system. China is one example of how to undertake Great Works in the twenty-first century. Key to their efforts is a clear and optimistic vision of the future within and outside official structures, deeply embedded in Chinese discourse. Futurity therefore seeming to be a prerequisite for effecting changes on the scale of Great Works, the West should embark on a vision quest for their own, new futures. Whether this means a backslide to high modernism or the adoption of something with Chinese characteristics, certainly something drastic is merited. The Small Works of neoliberalism can offer no solution to global environmental problems. Additional research which seeks practical methods of kick-starting futurist discourse in Western society—as daunting a task as that may seem—should therefore have a very real impact on the environment.

- <sup>1</sup> James McCarthy and Scott Prudham, "Neoliberal nature and the nature of neoliberalism", *Geoforum* 35, no. 3 (May 2004): 275-277.
- <sup>2</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23.
- <sup>3</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3-5.
- <sup>4</sup> Horizons, intelligibility, and other discursive analytical methods drawn from Aletta J. Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (London: Verso, 1996), 2-5, 7, 63.
- <sup>5</sup> This is the author's own jargon and does not pre-exist in literature.
- <sup>6</sup> S. Mohsin Hashim, " "High Modernism" and Its Limits – Assessing State Incapacity in Putin's Russia, 2000–2008", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, no. 3 (2017): 196-197; Richard Kyle Paisley and Taylor Warren Henshaw, "Transboundary governance of the Nile River Basin: Past, present and future", *Environmental Development* 7 (2013): 59-71.
- <sup>7</sup> Paul Crutzen, 'Geology of Mankind', *Nature* 415 (2002): 23; Jan Zalasiewicz,, Mark Williams, Alan Haywood, and Michael Ellis, "The Anthropocene: A New Epoch of Geological Time?", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369 (2011): 836.
- <sup>8</sup> Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu* (Broome: Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation, 2014), 27-28, 117-119.
- <sup>9</sup> Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu* (Broome: Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation, 2014), 122.
- <sup>10</sup> Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 115-123.
- <sup>11</sup> Morgan Brigg, Mary Graham, and Martin Weber, "Relational Indigenous Systems: Aboriginal Australian Political Ordering and Reconfiguring IR," *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 5 (August 2021): 891-893, 903-904.
- <sup>12</sup> David Guillet, David L. Browman, Terence N. D'Altroy, Robert C. Hunt, Gregory W. Knapp, Thomas F. Lynch, William P. Mitchell, et al. "Terracing and Irrigation in the Peruvian Highlands", *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (1987): 409-430.
- <sup>13</sup> S. Mohsin Hashim, " "High Modernism" and Its Limits – Assessing State Incapacity in Putin's Russia, 2000–2008", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, no. 3 (2017): 196-197.
- <sup>14</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 227; David Ekbladh, "Meeting the Challenge from Totalitarianism: The Tennessee Valley Authority as a Global Model for Liberal Development, 1933-1945", *The International History Review* 32, no. 1 (2010): 50-52.
- <sup>15</sup> Ekbladh, "The Tennessee Valley Authority", 52.
- <sup>16</sup> Morton Keller, "Looking at the State: An American Perspective", *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001): 117.
- <sup>17</sup> Keller, "Looking at the State", 116-117.
- <sup>18</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, directed by Adam Curtis (BBC, 2016), 00:23:56.
- <sup>19</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, 00:01:55.
- <sup>20</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, 00:24:16.
- <sup>21</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, directed by Adam Curtis (BBC, 2016), 01:14:57
- <sup>22</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, 00:03:16.
- <sup>23</sup> This is somewhat arbitrary; for a better look at the breadth of neoliberalism, see James McCarthy and Scott Prudham, "Neoliberal nature and the nature of neoliberalism", *Geoforum* 35, no. 3 (May 2004): 275-283.
- <sup>24</sup> McCarthy and Prudham, "Neoliberal nature", 276.
- <sup>25</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, directed by Adam Curtis (BBC, 2016), 01:40:00; Contolism here serves as a pop-cultural (that is, discursive) representation given form in the space exploration obsessions of the super-rich in the twenty-first century, e.g. Musk, Bezos—for more on Contolism, see Ian Gregory, "Towards a Historiography of Gundam's One Year War", *Zimmerit*, September 15, 2020, <http://www.zimmerit.moe/historiography-gundam-one-year-war-canon/>.
- <sup>26</sup> US Congress, House, Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal, HR 332, 117th Congress, introduced in House October 19, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/332>.
- <sup>27</sup> Owen Nevin and Andrew D. Ramsey, "Achieving socioeconomic recovery and biodiversity restoration objectives through gray whale reintroduction", 19th Annual Meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology (July 2005).
- <sup>28</sup> *Hypernormalisation*, directed by Adam Curtis (BBC, 2016), 01:15:24.
- <sup>29</sup> William A. Callahan, "China's Futures and the World's Future: An Introduction," *China Information* 26, no. 2 (2012): 137; Mette Halskov Hansen, Hongtao Li, and Rune Svarverud, "Ecological Civilization: Interpreting the Chinese Past, Projecting the Global Future," *Global Environmental Change* 53 (November 2018): 195-196.
- <sup>30</sup> John Osburg, "Making Business Personal: Corruption, Anti-Corruption, and Elite Networks in Post-Mao China," *Current Anthropology* 59, no. S18 (April 2018): 149-152.
- <sup>31</sup> Kevin Tellier (@kevtellier), "The broad sentiment within China is that the United States is captured by entrenched interests and cannot restructure its

system to escape these traps. 1/", Twitter thread, September 25, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210925144744/https://twitter.com/kevteulier/status/1441774309652025346>

<sup>32</sup> Which is to say, there are no monographs assessing China's high modernism to cite here.

<sup>33</sup> William A. Callahan, "China's Futures and the World's Future: An Introduction," *China Information* 26, no. 2 (2012): 140.

<sup>34</sup> Callahan, "China's Futures", 140-141.

<sup>35</sup> Callahan, "China's Futures", 140, 142.

<sup>36</sup> "Belt and Road Initiative", World Bank, accessed June 19, 2022,

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>.

<sup>37</sup> "China unveils action plan on Belt and Road Initiative", The State Council of the People's Republic of China, accessed June 19, 2022, [http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2015/03/28/content\\_281475079055789.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/03/28/content_281475079055789.htm); "Overview", Belt and Road Forum 2019, accessed June 19, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190917091133/http://www.beltandroadforum2019.com/conference-profile/overview/>.

<sup>38</sup> "Belt and Road Initiative", World Bank, accessed June 19, 2022,

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>.

<sup>39</sup> Enrico (@enfree1993), "As a Kenyan official put it: Every time China visits we get a hospital, every time Britain visits we get a lecture.", Twitter post, March 25, 2022, <https://twitter.com/enfree1993/status/1507240761431302144>.

<sup>40</sup> Kanchana N. Ruwanpura, Peter Rowe, and Loritta Chan, "Of Bombs and Belts: Exploring Potential Ruptures within China's Belt and Road Initiative in Sri Lanka," *The Geographical Journal* 186, no. 3 (February 20, 2020): 342.

<sup>41</sup> "Three-north Shelterbelt Forest Program", The State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China, accessed June 19, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140315074537/http://english.forestry.gov.cn/web/article.do?action=readnew&id=201001141142307633>.

<sup>42</sup> Hong Jiang, "Taking down the 'Great Green Wall': The Science and Policy Discourse of Desertification and Its Control in China," in *The End of Desertification?: Disputing Environmental Change in the Drylands*, ed. Roy Behnke and Michael Mortimore (Berlin: Springer, 2016), 513-536.

<sup>43</sup> Joanne Yao, "Conquest from Barbarism": The

Danube Commission, International Order, and Control of Nature as a Standard of Civilization", *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 2 (2018): 335-359.

<sup>44</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 55.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth DeSombre, "Individual Behavior and Global Environmental Problems", *Global Environmental Politics* 18, no. 1 (2018): 5-12.

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# **The Erasmian Way?**

Integrating Historical Analysis with  
Contemporary Challenges

*By Dr. Daniel Curtis*

It is an honor to provide one of the first submissions to a new journal that is a truly student-led initiative—especially when the goal of the journal is to encourage new dialogues on the historical dimensions of marginalization and vulnerability. This links up very closely with my own research interests on aspects of “hidden” or “obscured inequalities” across time, which I try to bring across in the classroom. Given that it is also an Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) history initiative, in this short contribution, I intend to elaborate on some of the major facets of the “Erasmian Way” of “doing history”, how it relates to some of the current trends with regard to the increased prominence of fields such as “Applied History”, and some of the potential pitfalls that we might also try to avoid in our future research and educational strategies connected to this domain.

In my view, at EUR we try to write and teach a “problem-oriented” history. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the foundations of the department go back to an identity of “maatschappijgeschiedenis” (literally, history of societies), and the department has, and still, integrates itself closely within various social and cultural institutions in the city of Rotterdam itself.<sup>1</sup> Problems and challenges within contemporary society are at the center of our historical approaches—thus, issues connected to inequality, vulnerability, exclusion, the representation and appropriation of the past, globalization, the application and resistance to power, citizenship, and much more. That is not the same as simply applying contemporary terms to the past—leading to potential accusations of “presentism” or “anachronistic” thinking. Instead, we use our training as historians to assess these

concepts within very specific historical contexts, and to consider whether and how they apply, and whether they change or stay constant over time. Thus, in my teaching, I encourage students to think critically about the meaning, understanding, and application of the term “inequalities” for different societies as we go back into the past. Of course, we can use historical sources to calculate different kinds of measurements for distribution of economic resources going far back in time, but how those societies thought about, perceived, and understood that distribution is not necessarily equivalent to our conceptions today—and thus the meaning of any numbers we produce also differs considerably depending on historical context. In effect, we use the past to problematize these contemporary concepts. Furthermore, while we are interested in the link between the past and the present, it seems clear to me that history cannot directly “solve” contemporary problems. Instead, as the current issues of COVID-19 or exposure to global food price spikes or epistemic isolation show, historical analysis allows us to assess these problems in a new light, from different angles, relativizing processes and outcomes, and offers escape from myopia and short-term thinking.

One thing we need to be careful of in this approach is seeing the role of history as a kind of “guidebook”—something where we can draw clear “lessons” from the past. As a historian with expertise in society-epidemic interactions, I was in the beginning phases of the COVID-19 outbreak at first dismayed to see the public narratives on the social impact of the disease dominated by those outside the domains of the social sciences and humanities, but then second, the initial

(delayed) responses from historians on the subject also tended to be highly lackluster—instead providing sometimes dubious and often unoriginal statements as to whether COVID-19 was or was not like the Black Death or the Great Influenza, and whether we might “learn” from those experiences. In fact, as my research team and I already stated, COVID-19 likely had more analytical value moving in the opposite direction—shining new light on aspects of obscured inequalities and vulnerabilities that had been less foregrounded in historical treatment of epidemic disease.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, in my view, we need to make sure that “problem-oriented” historical approaches do not become shorthand for simply a series of cherry-picked analogies across time. Although the field of Applied History is becoming increasingly visible (as it was previously widely resisted in the mainstream of the historical disciplines),<sup>3</sup> it seems to me that a predominant focus still remains on the selection of interesting or “relevant” analogous developments between past and present.<sup>4</sup> Often it is difficult to see beyond “they did it differently in the past”, or “this thing that we see today has already been done in the past”. A proper methodological discussion of exactly how we apply history (in different ways) to contemporary issues is somehow missing, despite the initial steps taken a few years ago with the provocative *The History Manifesto*.<sup>5</sup> Path dependency, of course, should be one of the most relevant concepts—identifying the exact reasons why institutions, systems, and aspects of cultural values are sometimes difficult to shift, and how they in turn affect societies further down the line—as that is an explicit linking of past and present. However, this is not an

approach first developed in Applied History, but in strands of neo-institutionalist literature already at the center of the mainstream of social and economic history.<sup>6</sup> My criticism of Applied History remains—what is so different from that which we are already doing? Surely these are just a basic set of general principles of proper analytical history widely seen and adhered to across sub-fields of the discipline that are already being implemented? I am, of course, always willing to be convinced.

In arguing for the “value of history” for the present, I tend to emphasize two key methodological aspects to students (accepting, of course, that these are not the “only” ways of doing history). First, I emphasize that the historical record, despite its gaps, limitations, and biases, can also serve as a rich “laboratory” to test hypotheses developed in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, broadly conceived.<sup>7</sup> Historical evidence and “data” can help us empirically test hypotheses and frameworks across a wide range of contextual conditions—and we historians are well placed to use this data as our command of the source material and contextual conditions of source production is far superior to your average economist, sociologist, or climate scientist. Thus, to take just one example, the “female mortality advantage”—the phenomenon of women out-surviving men during famines (and to a certain extent, epidemics) said to be closely connected to biological and physiological principles—can be empirically verified and tested with historical information on sex-disaggregated mortality going back into the past. And indeed, while modern 19th- and 20th-century demographic data tends to support some of the basic tenets of the

concept,<sup>8</sup> other research going back further in time brings up some of the inconsistencies in its application for pre-industrial contexts.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, the idea that epidemic diseases have served as a “great leveler” for societies—creating egalitarian effects—is a principle that can be tested only by going back further in time; in the process uncovering all kinds of markers and indicators that can serve as proxies for redistribution, the mechanisms involved in dictating the direction of redistribution, and the meaning or value of such markers and indicators for the specific societies and communities involved.<sup>10</sup> The temporal nature of the redistributive process makes it impossible to answer without recourse to history—an issue I address next.

Second, I often assert to students that, in certain regards, the historical record can even be more “useful” or more “valuable” than contemporary information. Indeed, we should stop being afraid of having to justify our “relevance”. To begin with, past societies, particularly when we go back further in time to the premodern periods, benefit from strong regional disparities (especially in the countryside) as a source of endogenous variation. Accordingly, we can test hypotheses in a variety of conditions across societies with very different cultural values—levels of trust or emphasis on concepts of honor or shame, for example—or societies with very different levels of material inequality, or systems of property rights, or market integration. But more

importantly, we should learn to assert the intrinsic value of the historical record in itself—after all, it is the only material we have to be able to reconstruct outcomes and developments played out over the long term. Thus, we see, for example, a plethora of recent literature talking about the gendered impacts of COVID-19, and the potential impact of this pandemic on the lives of women across the world.<sup>11</sup> Interesting and valuable, of course, but the impact of COVID-19 on a structural level—the long-term outcomes for women in domains such as human capital formation or chronic health issues or access to economic resources or micro-demographic decision-making and behavior—actually will not be known for some time. These markers simply do not exist yet. In fact, it is only by using historical analysis of epidemics further back in the past can we start to analyze these gendered dimensions played out structurally, and to see whether they persist over time or are just temporary deviations from the norm.

This final point about using history to understand long-term processes—our one clear added-value over other disciplines such as economics or anthropology—is important when I apply this to the context of current and future research and teaching of history at EUR. “Problem-oriented” or “applied” history is not short-hand for “modern history”—just being more temporally modern is not in itself being more “relevant”. In fact, it seems that the biggest advantage we have (when compared to other disciplines) comes from our ability to master historical information linking the deeper past and the more recent past—in the process also escaping the confines of traditionally entrenched (and

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**“WE SHOULD STOP BEING AFRAID OF HAVING TO JUSTIFY OUR “RELEVANCE”.”**

usually Eurocentric) historical periodization. Indeed, it is only by linking historical periods that we learn that economic concepts such as the “male breadwinner” have only really very recent origins and resonance (only from the 19th century),<sup>12</sup> certain parts of Africa have only very recently become centers of gravity for famine (only from later in the 20th century),<sup>13</sup> improvements to public health institutions and infrastructure has not been one long linear story of “progress”,<sup>14</sup> and that notions of tolerance and compassion during epidemics have not gone hand-in-hand neatly with increased understanding of the “science” behind disease causes, transmission, and spread.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alex van Stipriaan, Gijsbert Oonk, and Sandra Manickam, “Preface,” in *History @ Erasmus: Histories of Encounters*, eds. Alex van Stipriaan, Gijsbert Oonk, and Sandra Manickam (Rotterdam: Veenman+, 2018), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Bram Hilken, Bram van Besouw, and Daniel R. Curtis, “A Modern Rendition of a Pre-modern Scenario: Imperfect Institutions and Obscured Vulnerabilities,” *Journal for the History of Environment and Society* 5, no. 1 (2020): 211–221; Daniel R. Curtis and Bram van Besouw, “Not Learning from History: Learning from COVID-19,” *Wiley: COVID-19 Resources for the Research Community*, April 14, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> A clear overview of its emergence, and resistance to its emergence, in Violet Soen and Bram De Ridder, “Applied History in the Netherlands and Flanders: Synergising Practices in Education, Research, and Society,” *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* 136, no. 4 (2021): 27–57.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Beatrice de Graaf, Lotte Jensen, Rina Knoeff, and Catrien Santing, “Dancing with Death: A Historical Perspective on Coping with Covid-19,” *Risk, Hazards, & Crisis in Public Policy* 12, no. 3 (2021): 346–367. The same authors make an enthusiastic case for a Dutch applied history manifesto, but with limited attention to the exact methods currently developed or we need to develop to specifically link past and present: idem, “Historici moeten ook meedenken, juist nu,” *NRC Handelsblad*, 1 May, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See, the classic, Sheilagh Ogilvie, “‘Whatever is, is right’? Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe,” *Economic History Review* 60, no. 4 (2007): 649–684.

<sup>7</sup> Bas van Bavel and Daniel R. Curtis, “Better Understanding Disasters by Better Using History: Systematically Using the Historical Record as One Way to Advance Research into Disasters,” *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 34, no. 1 (2016): 143–169.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Zarulli, Julia A. Barthold Jones, Anna Oksuzyan, Rune Lindahl-Jacobsen, Kaare Christensen and James W. Vaupel, “Women Live Longer than Men even during Severe Famines and Epidemics,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 4 (2018): 832–840.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel R. Curtis and Qijun Han, “The Female Mortality Advantage in the Seventeenth-Century Rural Low Countries,” *Gender and History* 33, no. 1 (2021): 50–74; Daniel R. Curtis, “From One Mortality Regime to Another? Mortality Crises in Late Medieval Haarlem, Holland, in Perspective,” *Speculum* 96, no. 1 (2021): 127–155; Daniel R. Curtis and Joris Roosen, “The Sex-Selective Impact of the Black Death and Recurring Plagues in the Southern Netherlands, 1349–1450,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164, no. 2 (2017): 246–259; Jonathan Healey, “Famine and the female mortality advantage: sex, gender and mortality in northwest England, c. 1590–1630,” *Continuity and Change* 30, no. 2 (2015): 153–192; Sharon N. DeWitte and Maryanne Kowaleski, “Black Death Bodies,” *Fragments: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Ancient and Medieval Pasts* 6 (2017): 1–37.

<sup>10</sup> For the original thesis: Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Clare Wenham, Julia Smith, and Rosemary Morgan, “COVID-19: The gendered impacts of the outbreak,” *The Lancet* 395, no. 10227 (2020): 846–848; Clare Wenham, Julia Smith, Sara E. Davies, Huiyun Feng, Karen A. Grépin, Sophie Harman, Asha Herten-Crabb, and Rosemary Morgan, “Women are most affected by pandemics — Lessons from past outbreaks,” *Nature* 583, no. 7815 (2020) 194–198.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Griffin, *Bread Winner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Alex de Waal, *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Guy Geltner, *Roads to Health: Infrastructure and Urban Wellbeing in Later Medieval Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Samuel K. Cohn, *Epidemics: Hate and Compassion from the Plague of Athens to AIDS* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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# **The Global and the Local in the History Department**

*By Prof. Dr. Alex van Stripriaan*

In 2018 Sandra Manickam, Gijsbert Oonk and myself edited *Histories of Encounters; History @ Erasmus*. It was a sort of inventory of where we came from as a History Department and of the state of the art of our research at that particular time. We observed that "[I]n both education and research, questions from the present tend to be key and often broad historical lines are followed. We mainly choose subjects which go beyond the national angle and focus on the interaction between local and global levels and any changes or continuities which are associated with that. Many courses are therefore given from an inter- or a transnational or even global perspective." Now a bit more than four years later I think this still counts. However, I also think more can and should be done to keep a relevant position in academia as well as in society. We once started as Social History (*Maatschappijgeschiedenis*) from a need to help understand present societies by studying their histories. In Europe as well as in the Americas, Asia and Africa. And that is what we still do. However, I am under the impression that we tend to forget our department itself is also part of (a) society. Maybe less so from an economic angle, but, as far as I can see, from a socio-cultural approach, in our curriculum the department's surrounding society is hardly represented.

In 2020 three books in Dutch and one in English were published on the colonial history of the city of Rotterdam as well as its post-colonial condition. Our head of department Paul van de Laar and myself were among the authors. That project, initiated by the municipality of Rotterdam, reminded me of the importance of proximity. We can not think global, or teach

and research global historical developments, if we forget to think about and study our micro locality. If we do not do that, it is for certain that others will not do it either. And that's a waste, because we lose important insights by omitting this.

Writing my book on the slavery past of Rotterdam (*Rotterdam in Slavernij*), gave me many unexpected new insights about this city, this nation, as well as about globalization. Insights I had not yet discovered during the previous four decades of research on slavery. That was only possible through an approach from the angle of the location we are based in as an institution. A comparable book from an Amsterdam angle for example, would surely be different, I know now.

We need to understand why in 2020 thousands of Rotterdammers filled the Erasmus Bridge stating Black Lives Matter; why this differed from the parallel demonstration at Amsterdam's Dam Square and elsewhere; and why they are meanwhile all part of a (sudden?) world wide movement. We need to understand why Rotterdam is hip hop capital of the Netherlands. We need to understand why Rotterdammers from all backgrounds think that they have a unique claim to be people who don't bullshit but act. What is the historical background to all this?

Our department should facilitate that need and study those historical backgrounds. Preferably by appointing a female professor of colour to fill that gap.



# **Moving Visions**

Studying History in the 21st Century

*By Dr. Yuri van Hoef*



**HISTORY IS ON THE MOVE. THOSE WHO CANNOT KEEP UP WILL BE LEFT BEHIND, TO WATCH FROM A DISTANCE.<sup>1</sup>**

Asked to reflect on what studying history means, the above quote (from one of the favourite books of teenage me) immediately came to me. History is on the move. It is not stagnant, but everchanging, open to interpretation, and definitely not boring. Thus, studying history requires an open and ever questioning attitude. To be prepared to learn. To even be prepared to be shocked. The goal of the university is to prepare us for a life of eternal learning, to provide us with the starter kit of the historian. Those tools start with ourselves.

Ourselves, because, as I was taught on my very first day as a student; a university is a meeting of minds first: a meeting of experts. That includes everyone, especially the students, because each one of us brings highly valuable and unique knowledge. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the safe sharing of that knowledge. To provide some of the basic tools, yes, and some of the expert tools based on their own highly specific area of expertise, that too, but also to know when to step aside and yield the floor. The greatest joy of teaching is to see the difference past and present students make in the world.

History moves, but not always as quickly as we would wish: "Inertia rides and riddles me; The which is called philosophy".<sup>2</sup> As history changes, so do the people studying history, and the methods we adapt. As a student, forced to do archival research, I was horrified when the archivist proudly shared they had recently finishing modernizing the archive: "Everything is super modern now! You can browse everything on microfilm!" Microfilm?! In the age of the internet! There will always be a disconnect between the

new and the previous generations of scholars. It is our task to share our expertise, so the new generation can continue moving forward.

Without a doubt, our school offers the finest and most contemporary education in history in the Netherlands. No other university offers the amount of contact hours and personal supervision we do. Yet there are blind spots in our programme, both in its forward momentum, and in its slowness adapting to change. We should provide both a more robust grounding in historiography and theory, and the in-depth means to critique them.<sup>3</sup> Each student should contend with Barbara Tuchman's vision of history,<sup>4</sup> and would benefit from having R. G. Collingwood's party trick ready to explain why history is mother to all disciplines.<sup>5</sup> In diversity and intersectionality too, the university is very much a twentieth century place, hesitant to engage with more modern debates.<sup>6</sup> As history is on the move, it is also our own task to move on and make place. After all, the quote from my favourite fictional villain ends with a foreboding warning: "And those who stand in our way will not watch at all".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Zahn, *The Last Command* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Parker, *Enough Rope: Poems* (Open Road Media, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2011).

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# **University, Society, and the Individual**

Some Reflections on the Purpose of  
History in Higher Education Today

*By Dr. Lara Green*



**OUR CONVERSATIONS ARE A PROFOUND REMINDER OF WHAT IT IS TO BE HUMAN IN OUR WORLD TODAY.**

Here at Erasmus we 'connect the past with the present' through researching and studying history.<sup>1</sup> Watching the news today, it is not difficult to appreciate the importance of the academic study of history. While dictators, populists, and self-styled voices of the masses twist and even outright invent stories from the past, historians are working carefully to uncover or reinterpret evidence and they are looking critically at the ways in which the past is interpreted.

However, history does not only serve society in this way, but can also help us to understand ourselves and our own place in the world.

As a first-year university student, I would have found it difficult to explain why I had chosen to study history. I had enjoyed the subject at school, but I had never really seen myself in the histories we studied. History was a means to an end, one which perhaps I envisaged as leading to a career in business or law. That was, until one of my very first seminars at university. Our lecturer shared with us a draft of a book in-progress and I knew from that moment that I wanted to be a historian. What we discussed that day was how menstruation and pregnancy were conceptualised in Early Modern France and how women actively used the discourse to gain access to resources or improve their lives in other ways.<sup>2</sup> Suddenly, I saw that history was so much more than 'great men' and I could not get enough of it.

To me, teaching history is to have the opportunity to help students have their own

'lightbulb moments'. To help them see how the past can help them to understand the world around them today, and their own experiences in it. Perhaps they will not become historians of protest movements against the Vietnam War in South America, or of queer histories of colonial South Africa, or of women soldiers in the Soviet Union. But I hope they will take away understanding of where and how to look.

Today, to study the humanities could be considered a radical act. Politicians opine on the importance of STEM education and the fact that we all ought to be learning to write code.<sup>3</sup> But what is the purpose of higher education in our society today? Is it only to improve your job prospects? Or is it something far more valuable? I was dismayed when a previous programme I had taught in was closed by the university in a drive to emphasise so-called 'career-focused' programmes.<sup>4</sup> This history programme had long served its local students and those returning to education after decades in the workforce, contributing to equality of opportunity in society far beyond the work of many other institutions.

Luckily, however, the future of the humanities in the Netherlands appears to be more secure. The recent Sector Plan for the Humanities has led to increased investment in research.<sup>5</sup> But we should not be complacent. The humanities remain vulnerable to political interference.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the challenges of working in today's higher education landscape, I am inspired by you, my students, every day. You surprise and intrigue me with your new interpretations of sources and by the ways



you connect our scholarly readings to their own experiences. Together we write new histories, even if those are fleeting and perhaps soon forgotten once you filter out of the classroom after the tutorial has ended. Our conversations are a profound reminder of what it is to be human in our world today and, for that, I am grateful.

Olivia B. Waxman, 'The Real Reason Florida Wants to Ban AP African-American Studies, According to an Architect of the Course', *Time*, 1 February 2023. <https://time.com/6251733/ap-african-american-history-professor-florida-interview/>

<sup>1</sup> 'International Bachelor History'.

<https://www.eur.nl/en/bachelor/international-bachelor-history>

<sup>2</sup> In case you are interested, this is the monograph in question: Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in Early Modern France* (Routledge, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> For example, the UK government's advertising campaign on the issue was widely ridiculed: 'Dying swan or lame duck? Why 'Fatima' the ballerina's next job was tripping up the government', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/oct/13/dying-swan-or-lame-duck-why-fatima-the-ballerinas-next-job-was-tripping-up-the-government>. Around the same time, the Australian government increased fees for humanities courses compared to science and technology: Alan Sears and Penney Clarke, 'Stop telling students to study STEM instead of humanities for the post-coronavirus world', *The Conversation*, 28 September 2020. <https://theconversation.com/stop-telling-students-to-study-stem-instead-of-humanities-for-the-post-coronavirus-world-145813>.

<sup>4</sup> History UK, 'Statement on the closure of History at the University of Sunderland', 5 February 2020. <https://www.history-uk.ac.uk/2020/02/05/history-uk-statement-on-the-closure-of-history-at-the-university-of-sunderland/>

<sup>5</sup> 'Sectorplan Social Sciences and Humanities'. <https://www.sectorplan-ssh.nl/>

<sup>6</sup> For example, in Hungary and Florida: Central European University, 'CEU Reiterates Opposition to Removal of Gender Studies Programs in Hungary', 16 October 2018. <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2018-10-16/ceu-reiterates-opposition-removal-gender-studies-programs-hungary;>

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# **"Changez vos Feuilles, Gardez Vos Racines"**

A Personal Vision on History Education  
at the Erasmus University

*By Dr. Maarten F. Van Dijck*

## History of Society as Guidance

I took the quotation in the title from the work of the famous French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885). He wrote in his posthumously published *Post-Scriptum de ma vie*: "Change your leaves, keep intact your roots".<sup>1</sup> I think that this phrase should be a guideline for making educational and research policies within the history department of the Erasmus University. The history department at the Erasmus University was founded in 1978 as a new part of the Faculty of Social Sciences. This genealogy implies that history is not seen as a field of the humanities at Erasmus University, but as a social science. The vision on history at Erasmus University differed from other universities in several ways. The unique profile of the department was described as 'history of society' and it was characterized by (1) the comparison of different types of societies from all over the world to avoid Eurocentrism, (2) a diachronic study of relevant themes in society from a long-term perspective to explain the present, (3) the use of social science theories and methodologies, and (4) an active preparation for the labour market during the study.<sup>2</sup> This specific perspective on historical science made the Rotterdam programme distinct from those at other universities in the Netherlands. I think that it is wise to stay faithful to this original mission in our attempts to define the profile of our department. The leaves may change as staff come and go over time, but the roots are strong and make sure that we are distinct from other history departments. This will legitimise and strengthen our position in the Dutch academic landscape because it makes that we add something different to the academic field of history.

The department has witnessed several

major changes in its 45 years of existence. The general trend during the past decades was to move further away from the original concept of 'history of society'. This had to do with the fact that new staff were often trained at other universities and had little affinity with the concept 'history of society'. In this way, the department became more mainstream and relied more and more on traditional examples of historical scholarship. I think that this is a pity because the unique Rotterdam approach made studying and doing research in Rotterdam a deliberate choice and it legitimized the existence of the department in the proximity of other history departments. I believe that it also ensures that history in Rotterdam is a more exciting field because it questions traditional perspectives and opens up new directions for research.

## History of Society in the Bachelor Curriculum

The name History of Society remained the official name of the master programme until 2018. That year, the master coordinator asked to remove this name from the national CROHO register.<sup>3</sup> However, the Rotterdam approach to history is still reflected in our bachelor and master programmes. It is no coincidence that Rotterdam was the first history department in the Netherlands that offered an international bachelor programme, starting in the academic year 2015-2016. This fits in the history of society approach which favours an international oriented approach above a Dutch view on history. It was a deliberate choice to teach students in the first term of the programme the course 'Global History' because this makes clear that the world and not Europe should be the frame of reference for students. It was the aim to apply the same global approach in all

courses, but this remains a challenge in the current programme. Several courses still refer to the Europe-centred modernisation process to teach historical developments. This is visible in the name of courses such as 'History of Early Modern Societies' and 'History of Modern Societies'. The original history programme tried to avoid such a European grand-narrative by discerning different types of societies which could be found all over the world: Pre-Agricultural, Agricultural, Agricultural-Urban and Industrial Societies.<sup>4</sup> One could argue that these typologies also reflect a Europe-centred idea of gradual growth towards modern industrialisation and beyond, but it offered students a fresh substitute to traditional ways of teaching history.

Our bachelor programme offers students the chance to make a choice between four focus areas in their second year: social history, international relations, 'cultural history and economic history'. This is in line with the already mentioned long-term thematic approach typical for history of society with courses focusing on important societal topics instead of Eurocentric historical periods. In this way, the current set-up of the second and third year are more typical for the history of society approach than the curriculum of the first year. European periodisations are not used in the name of the course and staff members are asked to use a long-term thematic approach to teach about challenges in society, such as migration, interaction between religions, capitalism and inequality etc.

The third characteristic of the history of society approach in Rotterdam is the use of social science theories and methodologies.

The course History and Social Sciences in the first year of the bachelor programme introduces the students into major theories and concepts from the social sciences. In the second year of the bachelor programme students have to take Quantitative Historical Methods as a mandatory course because of the social science background of our history programme. This is quite unique in the Netherlands because all history studies removed this course from their core curriculum in the past decades. However, quantitative methods experience a revival at the moment. Utrecht University has already re-introduced quantitative methods in the first year of their bachelor programme.<sup>5</sup> This has to do with the growing popularity of big data and digital humanities. Other universities do not have a statistical course in their core curriculum, but it is expected that this will change in the future.<sup>6</sup> The use of big data repositories and new techniques to quantitatively investigate narrative sources urges historians to rely more on statistical methods.<sup>7</sup> This means that the old divide between quantitative-qualitative and social science-humanities research has become less relevant and that universities need to invest in new courses to offer students these new approaches into qualitative research.<sup>8</sup>

This brings us to the last point about our bachelor programme: the preparation for the labour market. This was a central point of interest of the original history of society programme and the presence of a mandatory internship is a legacy of this objective. History studies traditionally score quite low on this goal. The latest scores of the National Student Survey point out that history students give their programmes on average a score of 26 per cent for

preparation for the labour market. This is better than Arts and Culture studies which are the worst student in the class with a score of 18 percent, but it is far away from programmes such as econometrics and law that receive rates of respectively 83 and 61 per cent.<sup>9</sup> If we compare the academic history bachelors in the Netherlands according to the data of the National Student Survey, we can conclude that most history programmes – Rotterdam included – receive a score of 2.9 on a five points scale. Two universities received a lower score of 2.7 and only one has performed better with a rate of 3.0.<sup>10</sup> So, history at the EUR is not underperforming here, but we are no longer a frontrunner.

### **Master Specializations in History at Erasmus University**

The history department offers students the possibility to continue their education in the master. Currently, we have three specialisations: Global History and International Relations, GLOCAL, and Applied History. It is more difficult to tick the box for each of the Rotterdam characteristics in these one-year programmes, but each of them contains elements of the Rotterdam DNA. Global History and International Relations is the largest specialisation in our master, and it is characterized by the combination of concepts from political sciences – the international relations approach – and perspectives that transcend the white male views on global history. Students in this specialisation get an introduction into the long-term history of power relations in the world during the first two terms. The Rotterdam approach is also characterised by the critical approach to Eurocentric ideas of world order because this refers to the long-standing importance of non-western history

in the department. A question for the future is how we can distinguish ourselves from other programmes in international relations in the Netherlands and especially in Holland.

The interdisciplinary approach is one of the key features of the Erasmus Mundus master programme GLOCAL. This two-year master's degree has its roots in a network of business historians who wanted to create a programme at the intersection of economics and business history. In this way, they set up a master on the intersection of humanities and social sciences. This becomes clear when we look at the curriculum of the programme: all students have to start their first year at the University of Glasgow where they study at the School of Social and Political Sciences. The GLOCAL students are also able to study at the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Barcelona or the Department of Economic History of the University of Uppsala before joining the history department in Rotterdam. With its origins in business history, the GLOCAL programme perfectly fits in the profile of the Erasmus University and its strong tradition of economics and business.<sup>11</sup> However, it distinguishes itself from economic and business degrees with its emphasis on the combination of social sciences and humanities perspectives. The content of the programme also wants to avoid a Eurocentric approach by offering various perspectives on economic developments.

Its distinctive profile makes that GLOCAL is a unique programme in the Dutch educational field.

The latest addition to the history master is the specialization Applied History. This programme also stimulates interdisciplinary

exchanges by providing electives from the Media Department and Arts and Culture Studies. This emphasis on social sciences and interdisciplinary perspectives are an essential part of the Rotterdam DNA.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Applied History emphasizes another aspect of the Rotterdam history of society: the practical orientation of the historical approach and the attention for service to society. This was from the beginning a typical characteristic of history of society.<sup>13</sup> The programme did not only train students in writing academic papers, but also stimulated other forms of knowledge transfer. Film, television and radio making were seen as alternative ways of disseminating scientific results.<sup>14</sup> These fit in the current wish of the university to make social impact and to facilitate 'capstone projects' which are alternatives for the traditional thesis that prepares students for a career in science. The applied nature of this specialization is in line with the tradition of history of society, but the new programme still needs to establish itself in the Dutch academic landscape. The choice to offer Applied History was a way to connect with the department's own history. However, it is also an orientation towards the future now we see that the field of Applied History is becoming more prominent.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Victor Hugo, *Post-scriptum de ma vie* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1901), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/63768/pg63768-images.html.utf8>.

<sup>2</sup> [Alex van Stipriaan, Gijsbert Oonk, and Sandra Khor Manickam, 'Preface', in *Histories of Encounters*, ed. Alex van Stipriaan, Gijsbert Oonk, and Sandra Khor Manickam (Rotterdam: Erasmus University, Erasmus School of History Culture and Communication, 2018), 5–6, <hdl.handle.net/1765/115410>; Willem T. M. Frijhoff, 'Tien Jaar Maatschappijgeschiedenis: Kritische Overwegingen Bij Een Lustrum', in *Geschiedenis En*

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<sup>3</sup> Minutes of the departmental meeting of 30 January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> van Stipriaan, Oonk, and Manickam, 'Preface', 5.

<sup>5</sup> 'Studieprogramma Geschiedenis', accessed 26 March 2023, <https://www.uu.nl/bachelors/geschiedenis/studieprogramma>.

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<sup>8</sup> Roberto Franzosi, 'A Third Road to the Past? Historical Scholarship in the Age of Big Data', *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 50, no. 4 (2017): 227–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01615440.2017.1361879>.

<sup>9</sup> *Keuzegids Universiteiten 2023* (Leiden: Keuzegids, 2022), 68–72, 87, 121.

<sup>10</sup> 'Vergelijken: Studiekeuze123', [studiekeuze123.nl](https://studiekeuze123.nl),

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Thomas van de Laar, 'De Identiteit van Een Rotterdamse Universiteit', in *Ambitie En Identiteit*. Van Nederlandsche Handels-Hoogeschool Tot Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 1913-2013, ed. M. Dicke, Paul Thomas van de Laar, and Joop C. Visser (Rotterdam: Stad en bedrijf, 2013), 91.

<sup>12</sup> Frijhoff, 'Tien Jaar Maatschappijgeschiedenis: Kritische Overwegingen Bij Een Lustrum', 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Maandag, 'Uitbreiding En Profilering', in *Ambitie En Identiteit*. Van Nederlandsche Handels-Hoogeschool Tot Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 1913-2013, ed. M. Dicke, Paul Thomas van de Laar, and Joop C. Visser (Rotterdam: Stad en bedrijf, 2013), 62; van de Laar, 'De Identiteit van Een Rotterdamse Universiteit', 93.

<sup>14</sup> Frijhoff, 'Tien Jaar Maatschappijgeschiedenis: Kritische Overwegingen Bij Een Lustrum', 14; van Stipriaan, Oonk, and Manickam, 'Preface', 6.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance the foundation of a new journal in this field. 'Journal of Applied History', accessed 28 March 2023, <https://brill-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/view/journals/joah/joah-overview.xml>.



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