

*Featuring:*

Leslie Luqueno '20

Rebecca Chang '19

Sierra Zareck '20

Jack Brower '19

Volume 7, Issue 1, 2018-2019  
John B. Hurford '60 Center for  
the Arts and Humanities  
Haverford College

# BODY TEXT

# BODY TEXT

Volume 7, Issue 1, 2018-2019  
John B. Hurford '60 Center for  
the Arts and Humanities  
Haverford College

*Body Text* is published annually by the *Body Text* Editorial Board at Haverford College, 370 Lancaster Avenue, Haverford, PA 19041. Formerly the *Haverford Journal*, it was founded in the spring of 2004 by Robert Schiff in an effort to showcase some of Haverford's best student work in the humanities and social sciences. The publication was renamed in 2012 but still holds true to this original mission.

Student work appearing in *Body Text* is selected by the Editorial Board. Entries are judged on the basis of academic merit, clarity of writing, persuasiveness, and other factors that contribute to the quality of a given work.

All works cited as in the original text.

© 2019



## EDITORIAL BOARD

### *Editors-in-Chief*

Matthew Jablonski '19

Joanne Mikula '20

### *Board Members*

Mathilde Denegre '21

Aarushi Mohan '20

### *Advisors*

James Weissinger

Courtney Carter

### *Designer*

Duncan Cooper

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*/'bādē/ /tekst/*

noun

1. The main part of a printed text, excluding items such as headings and footnotes. (*The Oxford English Dictionary*)
1. Haverford College's student-run, student-written academic journal, which publishes the sharpest, most provocative undergraduate scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences and explores the limits of academic writing outside the classroom.

---

# Table of Contents

- 6 Letter from the Editors
- 8 ¿La Ciudad con Belleza o La Ciudad con Vergüenza?  
Exploring the Chicana experience of empowerment and  
shame in East Los Angeles by Leslie Luqueno '20
- 30 New Visions of 'Sustainability' and 'Local': Vancouver and  
New York City Chinatown's Asian Immigrant Food Networks  
by Rebecca Chang '19
- 44 Forced Cultural Distance and the African Diaspora: Exploring  
Black Identity in "Notes for a Speech" and "To the Diaspora"  
by Sierra Zareck '20
- 54 Held Together with Rum: Alcohol as a Stabilizing Agent in  
Pirate Communities by Jack Brower '19

---

# Letter from the Editors

Dear *Body Text* reader,

Welcome to the 2018-2019 edition of *Body Text*! The essays in this issue were selected for their clarity and persuasiveness, as well as their individuality of perspective and diversity of expression. We believe that this issue embodies some of the greatest undergraduate academic writing that Haverford has to offer, and we are pleased to present it to you.

The current editorial board is profoundly grateful to Courtney Carter '17 for the role that she played in the making of this volume. As *Body Text* Editor-in-Chief in 2016-2017, Courtney led the board through an exciting period of growth and visual rebranding. She returned to Haverford in the fall of 2018 as this year's Hurford Center Post-Bac Fellow, and has been advising the editorial board at every step of the process. From sharing lessons she learned as Editor-in-Chief to even setting up a meeting with Duncan Cooper, the designer of *Body Text*, Courtney has been an indispensable part of this issue.

Senior Matthew Jablonski and junior Joanne Mikula, both in their third year on the *Body Text* Editorial Board, assumed the Editor-in-Chief-ship this year. Joining the board for the first time this year are sophomore Mathilde Denegre and junior Aarushi Mohan.

As always, we were incredibly impressed by the caliber of academic writing by our fellow Haverford students. We open this issue with “¿La Ciudad con Belleza o La Ciudad con Vergüenza? Exploring the Chicana experience of empowerment and shame in East Los Angeles,” an autoethnography written by Leslie Luqueno '20. In this essay, Luqueno analyzes Chicana perceptions of empowerment and shame in her hometown of East LA. It is a moving piece that critically examines media representations of East LA and provides a counternarrative to these all too pervasive representations. Luqueno combines ethnographies of Latin American communities with news stories about East LA and her own interviews. The appendix features poems written by two of Luqueno's high school friends who participated in the ethnography, along with photos that support the text. By analyzing the

Chicana experience and highlighting the voices of her peers, Luqueno also reckons with her own relationship to her neighborhood in East LA.

In “New Visions of ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Local’: Vancouver and New York City Chinatown’s Asian Immigrant Food Networks,” Rebecca Chang ’19 examines how the language we use to talk about food can “unintentionally exclude groups that fall outside the dominant racial and socioeconomic narratives of the environmentalism movement.” Through two case studies of Asian immigrant food networks in North America, Chang challenges Western, scientific understandings of the words ‘sustainability’ and ‘locality’ as they apply to food. These immigrant food networks meet a distinct set of needs, often providing an economic and social sustainability that cannot be filled by corporate or mainstream food chains.

In her essay, “Forced Cultural Distance and the African Diaspora: Exploring Black Identity in ‘Notes for a Speech’ and ‘To the Diaspora,’” Sierra Zareck ’20 explores two poetic approaches to the themes of belonging and identity in the African diaspora. While Amiri Baraka’s “Notes for a Speech” details his anguish over his perceived rejection from Africa, Gwendolyn Brooks’ “To the Diaspora” proposes a solution to this pain: African Americans must locate Africa within themselves. In this timely essay, Zareck proposes a way for African Americans to begin to heal from the violent impact of slavery and colonialism on their cultural identity.

And finally, we close with “Held Together with Rum: Alcohol as a Stabilizing Agent in Pirate Communities,” written by returning *Body Text* author Jack Brower ’19. In this essay, Brower argues that alcohol worked on pirate ships as a mechanism to break down barriers and create new notions of community between sailors. Alcohol was one of the means by which pirates “functioned and survived in the counter-culture wooden communities they created.”

In their own way, these essays all push us to question our assumptions and engage with ideas and experiences in a new way. And they provide a diverse array of models for this task: from case studies, to poetry, to the analysis of primary sources. We are proud to present these four essays, and we hope you will find them as impactful and thought-provoking as we did.

Sincerely,

Matthew Jablonski ’19

Joanne Mikula ’20

Mathilde Denegre ’21

Aarushi Mohan ’20



---

**¿La Ciudad con Belleza o La Ciudad  
con Vergüenza? Exploring the  
Chicana experience of empowerment  
and shame in East Los Angeles**

Leslie Luqueno '20

## **ABSTRACT**

Using the testimonios of three Chicanas from East Los Angeles, along with my own history in the area, this autoethnography analyzes what contributes to Chicana perceptions of empowerment and shame of East Los Angeles. I argue that media representations and negative outsider discourses of East Los Angeles negatively impact Chicanas from the area, and therefore make Chicanas ashamed of their hometown. Furthermore, these discourses cause a desire for Chicanas to leave the area and when it is not possible, they create an additional layer of resentment towards East LA. However, I contend that distance between Chicanas and East LA, displacement in predominantly-white-areas, and access to spaces with Chicana feminist pedagogies contribute to a change in perception of East Los Angeles and lead Chicanas to reevaluate how they feel about their hometown. These factors challenge the negative discourses produced about East LA and lead to Chicanas feeling a sense of empowerment. This ethnography contributes to a better understanding of the Chicana experience in East Los Angeles and how mestiza consciousness and pedagogies of the home challenge negative discourses about the area. It also is a counternarrative of current representations of East Los Angeles, and allows for Chicanas from the area to tell their own story about their upbringing in the cultural enclave.

## **KEY WORDS**

East Los Angeles; Chicana; representation; perception

When I was in high school, I remember being asked repeatedly where I wanted to live when I grew up and I would always answer: “anywhere but here.” It was an easy answer at the time, I was exhausted of the negative discourses surrounding my hometown and the comments I would get from other people when I would say I am from Bell Gardens or East LA. On Friday nights, I remember travelling with my cheerleading team to other schools and whenever other students saw the Bell Gardens High School logo imprinted on our uniforms, they would tease us, calling us “Bell Ghetto High School,” “las idiotas de LA.” Even the adults from other schools made us feel inferior, asking us whether it would be safe for them to take their cheerleading team to my school’s home games and what the likeliness of having their car stolen was. I knew exactly why they asked; I knew they asked because all the news portrays us as a city where violence runs rampant.

Many people told me there was a solution: if I did well in school, I could get away from all the negative comments and “start over.” I would no longer have this city’s reputation following me everywhere I went. And I listened. When I was admitted to Haverford, even though people had never heard of the school, they celebrated me because at least I was leaving the city. Going out-of-state for college was a success solely because it was far away, because I was not getting “stuck” in this city, because I was flying away to “better things.”

But now here I am, and although I have everything I thought I wanted—a higher education studying the subject that I love—I still find myself missing my comunidad. Despite the negative discourses that I dealt with, East LA is the only place I have ever felt like I belong. I have grown to miss the culture I grew up in. I have realized that while I do not belong “neither here nor there,” since I am Chicana, being from East LA is a prominent part of my identity. While I do not feel comfortable referring to myself as “American,” I have wholeheartedly identified with being from East LA. East LA is the place where I really learned what it means to be Chicana, what it means to be myself. But I did not realize this until I left.

This past summer, I talked to my friends about wanting to come back to East LA because I missed being in a place where Chicana identity is at the core of the city. Two of my friends who stayed at East Los Angeles Community College laughed, asking me why I would ever want to come back when all they wanted to do was leave and never look back. I told them I felt displaced at Haverford and that through my courses on Latinx and Chicana identities, I no longer felt ashamed about my community; rather, I felt empowered by it. My best friend responded: “Well, all I feel is ashamed of staying here.”

## THE STUDY<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I utilize an autoethnographic method, positioning my own experience growing up in East LA and my perception of it in a larger context of how college-aged Chicanas experience the area and what feeds into that perception. Using qualitative research methods, I divide my research into three components. The first part includes representations of the area in the news and popular media. The second places my own experience in a broader context, through the testimonios of three of my Chicana high school friends. Through the use of poetry, written reflection, and images, they describe their perceptions of our community and offer insight on what contributes to their sense of empowerment or shame about East LA. The third part is autoethnographically driven, in which I give my own testimonio of my community through similar tasks as well as an analysis of two pieces I have previously written about the area, capturing the evolution of my perception.

### EL MUNDO NOS MIRA ASÍ

In the first component, I look at different representations of East LA presented in the news and media. Particularly, I focus on three different settings in which East Los Angeles and its residents have been portrayed. The first source of media is news coverage on a student-led walkout in March 2017, in which students from the Montebello Unified School District protested the laying off of over 300 school employees. I also focus on coverage of Chicana leadership in the protest, using both student publications and public news outlets. The second piece I look at is news coverage on teenage pregnancy in Bell Gardens in 2015, in which my city is referred to as “California’s teenage pregnancy hotspot.” The third source is news footage from 2016 on the assassination of Bell Gardens mayor, Daniel Crespo. The news coverage lasted for months, and English news stations portrayed Bell Gardens as a city “so dangerous that even the mayor got shot.” By using these three sources, I position how East LA is depicted by outsiders of the community. I then

---

<sup>1</sup> I included the methodology/methods section within the ethnography and edited the media sources used in section “El mundo nos mira asi” from the original version of this essay.

analyze how media representations and outsiders' perspectives of the area affect the perception of East Los Angeles for my three interlocutors and me.

## LA HISTORIA DE NOSOTRAS

I utilize varying forms of testimonios to allow Chicanas to contextualize their own experiences growing up in East Los Angeles. I reached out to three of my high school friends: Odalys, Lourdes, and Melissa. I contacted them because they each have shared with me their own stories about their upbringing in the area before, and I had some background on how they viewed East Los Angeles. Although somewhat biased in how I chose my interlocutors, I was also strategic because I knew that when sharing personal stories, it is hard to tell a stranger about those experiences. Because we had been friends for over three years, there was increased comfortability in the stories being shared.

Both Odalys and Lourdes attend East Los Angeles Community College (ELAC) and currently live at home and work full-time to support their families. At the time of my initial reaching out, Lourdes was still attending ELAC; however, she is now taking her second semester off in her college career due to family reasons and is circumstantially forced to stay home. Melissa currently attends UC Berkeley and only comes back to East LA during school breaks.

Within this group, all three are low-income Chicana students. However, only Lourdes and Odalys work full-time to support their homes. They also worked through high school. In high school, both Lourdes and Odalys were in the middle 50% of their graduating high school class while Melissa was in the top 1% of the class. Melissa also participated in various college access programs, which allowed her to visit different schools not in our immediate area. Odalys was also in a college access program but had to drop out due to her 20-hour work schedule after school. Although all three Chicanas grew up in the same area, they faced different circumstances that shaped their experiences in East LA and contributed to their desire either to come back to East LA or to leave.

Due to the distance between the three interlocutors and me, I was not able to hold in-person interviews. However, I took a written testimonio approach to compile their thoughts about our community. The first task I assigned each of them was to write a poem about East LA [see Appendixes I and II]. I did not give them many guidelines and told them to be as creative as they wanted with this project. The second task, assigned a week later, was for each of them to free write for seven minutes about the following prompt: *When you think*

of your city, what comes to mind? After writing about that prompt, I instructed them to answer a second prompt for another seven minutes: *Where do you want to be in the future? What place do you hope to call your home?* The third task was for them either to draw or to find three images that they thought best described East LA. The tasks were each given a week apart, acknowledging that these ladies had busy schedules and could not devote a lot of time to this project. However, by assigning each task a week apart, it gave them space to think throughout the week about how they view their community. Each task also informed how they approached the next task. Although there are limitations to written testimonios, writing also allows for them to express what is on their mind without having to find a way to cohesively say it out loud.

## MI HISTORIA IGUAL CUENTA

Since I also grew up in East LA and have my own perception of my community, I engaged in all three of the tasks as well. In previous courses, I have explored my experiences growing up in East LA. I analyzed two anthologies I had written about my home in different stages of my first year at Haverford. I wrote my first anthology, titled *This is Where I Am From*, about Los Angeles for my first year writing seminar on origin stories. I will be looking at the stories *Growing up Numb in East LA*, a piece in which I expressed my anger for the socioeconomic dynamics of Los Angeles and my frustration with the community I grew up in. I wrote the second anthology, *Ni de Aqui, Ni de Alla*, for my second-semester “Latino/a Culture and the Art of Undocumented Migration” course, in which I drew on my experiences as a second-generation migrant to describe my upbringing. I will also be looking at my poem *Home, Hogar*, in which I describe how I have grown to miss my community in California, and why I desire to go back after graduation. By analyzing these two anthologies that were written at different points of my first year, I hope to explore how my perception of East LA has evolved since coming to Haverford, and what has informed my change in perspective.

## MI COMUNIDAD

East Los Angeles embodies the heart of the Mexican diaspora in the United States. With 96% of the population identifying as Latinx and 80% of

them of Mexican heritage<sup>2</sup>, the area is an ethnic enclave with rich Latinx culture. Moreover, the essence of the Mexican diaspora is visible through East LA , such as in the Latinx murals dispersed throughout, the sounds of banda and corridos as one passes through the shops on Whittier Boulevard, and quinceañeras in abundance on the weekends. Mexican and American culture seamlessly come together and produce a unique and vibrant community.

However, like many ethnic enclaves, East Los Angeles is also an area with high levels of “poverty, police repression, institutional racism, and nativism.”<sup>3</sup> The concentration of working-class people of Mexican heritage in the area has led to the criminalization of the population due to institutionalized racism. Particularly, in Bell Gardens, a city in the outskirts of East Los Angeles where my interlocutors are from, 62% of the city’s budget goes into funding the police,<sup>4</sup> so police officers are constantly present around the city. The presence of police officers near the area’s high schools has been a significant factor in the criminalization of youth in the area, creating a negative rhetoric about the youth who grow up in East LA.

Along with the criminalization of the youth, underresourced schools and poverty impact students’ abilities to graduate from high school and go to college. In 2016, 86% of Bell Gardens High School seniors graduated, portraying a seemingly high graduation rate. However, when the class of 2016 entered the school as freshmen in fall 2012, there were 856 students. By the second semester of the senior year, only around 600 students remained with around 520 graduating.<sup>5</sup> As BGHS college counselor Tracy Brendzal states: “We have a good graduation rate for seniors because a majority of the students who are not bound to graduate drop out before their senior year or are sent to Vail High School [a continuation] at the end of their junior year.”<sup>6</sup> Around 50% of the senior class continues with higher education in either

---

2 “East Los Angeles, CA.” Data USA. Accessed December 16, 2017. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/east-los-angeles-ca/>.

3 Santos, Xuan. “The Chicana Canvas: Doing Class, Gender, Race, and Sexuality through Tattooing in East Los Angeles.” *NWSA Journal* 21, no. 3 (2009): 91-120.

4 Herrera, Erik. *The Non-Public Public Budget of Bell Gardens*. Essay (2016). Bell Gardens High School.

5 “Interview with BGHS College Counselor, Tracy Brendzal.” Interview by Abigail Plancarte. *Bell Gardens Lancer Scroll* (Bell Gardens), October 10, 2016.

6 II

community college, state schools, or private colleges.<sup>7</sup> However, only 17% of the population is currently enrolled in college.<sup>8</sup> Although 50% of students pursue higher education, only very few leave the state for college. In the 2015 class, three students went out-of-state; in 2016, four students left; and in 2017 no students went out-of-state.<sup>9</sup>

## NUESTRA REPUTACION EN EL MUNDO

*“The only times [Bell Gardens or East LA] comes on the news is when the mayor got shot and all the shootings on the weekend. People only know about the city because they saw on the news about the latest drive by or that our mayor got shot. We don’t have the best reputation.”*

—*Lourdes*

Though East Los Angeles is rich in Latinx culture, the media does not always focus on this aspect. Instead, whenever we turn on the news, the first thing we usually see is news reportage on the latest assault or crime that has happened in East LA. The depictions in the media about East LA contribute to the negative stereotypes that outsiders form about people from the area. Moreover, the negative media representation and outsider discourses impact the perception of East LA Chicanas who live there, cultivating a negative sense of the community.

To understand how media representation has impacted the area’s reputation, it is important to know what has contributed to this representation in the first place. Latinxs are disproportionately represented in stories related to crime and violence on primetime programming. Since East Los Angeles is a primarily Latinx community, it is also subject to being disproportionately represented as an area where crime runs rampant. As Ramon Antonio Martinez states:

*This is a story that has been told for more than half a century now, as*

---

7 II

8 II

9 “Interview with BGHS Principal.” Interview by Joaquin Luqueno. Bell Gardens Lancer Scroll (Bell Gardens), October 21, 2017.



*stereotypical representations of East Los Angeles have spread by means of local print and television news media, interpersonal communication channels, and Hollywood films, effectively demonizing youth from this community and generating widespread fear and misperceptions.<sup>10</sup>*

Particularly, two news events in the past two years have defined the recent perception of Bell Gardens and East LA. In 2015, Bell Gardens High School's Cal-SAFE program, a program that helps teenage mothers graduate from high school, came to light on the news when a former program student was the first in the program ever to go to a four-year college after graduation.<sup>11</sup> Though the news was featured in a positive light, it led to criticisms from people outside of the community when it was revealed that each year, over 50 BGHS students would enroll in the program. Soon, Bell Gardens and East LA gained a reputation for being a "pregnancy hot-spot" when the news extensively covered that Latina teenagers in the area were two to three times more likely to become pregnant.

Bell Gardens did not step out of the spotlight when in 2016, former mayor Daniel Crespo was shot by his wife after a domestic dispute over Crespo's abuse of their son and his affairs with other women.<sup>12</sup> News circulated the scandal throughout the United States, impacting not only the residents of East Los Angeles but also the perception outsiders had of the city. News headlines included: "Sex, Betrayal, Rage mark Testimony in Death of Bell Gardens Mayor," "The Troubled Life of Slain California Mayor," and "Bell Gardens Mayor Shot in his Home."

The negative news coverage with emphasis on crime and teenage pregnancy has impacted all of my interlocutors. When answering the prompt, *When you think of your city, what comes to mind?*, Lourdes wrote:

*When I think of East LA, I think about all the times we went to conferences*

---

10 Martínez, Ramón Antonio. "Are you gonna show this to white people?": Chicana/o and Latina/o students' counter-narratives on race, place, and representation." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 20, no. 1 (2015): 101-16. doi:10.1080/13613324.2015.1121219.

11 Martínez, Nancy. "Bell Gardens Teen Mom Overcomes Adversity." EPGNews. Accessed December 17, 2017. <http://egpnews.com/tag/bell-gardens-teen-pregnancy/>.

12 Gerber, Marisa, and Richard Winton. "Sex, betrayal, rage mark testimony in death of Bell Gardens mayor." Los Angeles Times. May 05, 2015. Accessed December 17, 2017. <http://beta.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-bell-gardens-mayor-grand-jury-transcripts-20150504-story.html>.

*at other schools and people would ask us if it was true that the mayor got shot. That's all we were known for. People didn't give a shit that somebody went to MIT the year before or any of the good stuff that goes around. They only care about the stuff they see on the news. And they think all us Mexicans go around shooting people when they cheat on us.*

Lourdes shows how the media has stigmatized and emphasized negative aspects of the community and how that has cultivated negative discourses with outsiders of the community. The media cultivation theory explains how “frequent media exposure leads people to eventually cultivate beliefs about the outside world that coincide with the media images and presented... [this would lead] to people adopting stereotypical attitudes about Latino people drawing from the images presented.”<sup>13</sup> In this case, Lourdes’s account shows how the image of the mayor being shot cultivates a stereotypical image of Latinxs in East LA and creates room for self-resentment towards our own community when these discourses follow us everywhere we go.

Media representations do not only impact outsider perception; they also affect how we see our own comunidad. During my writing seminar last year, my professor asked us to write a journal reflection on the location of our origin story and how it feels to be away from this location while at Haverford. I wrote:

*All I ever wanted to do was leave. People always assumed I was going to get pregnant instead of going to college. When I would go to other schools for football games in nice areas, people always brought up how they saw on the news that I was from the ‘teenage pregnancy capital of the nation’ or about some drive by that happened. Haverford isn’t perfect but at least no one brings that up now.*

For me, being surrounded with negative discourses about my comunidad created a sense of resentment towards my own hometown. I was made to feel ashamed about being from East LA, and even when I was outside of the area, these representations still followed me and made me trapped with an identity I did not ask for. This feeling of entrapment

---

13 Rivadeneyra, Rocío, L. Monique Ward, and Maya Gordon. “Distorted Reflections: Media Exposure and Latino Adolescents Conceptions of Self.” *Media Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2007): 261-90. doi:10.1080/15213260701285926.

contributes to a feeling of shame for Chicanas in East LA; it creates a toxic relationship between the individual and their negatively-painted comunidad that is heavily influenced by representations made by people outside of the community. Moreover, the resentment and entrapment Chicanas experience create an increased desire to leave the comunidad. For me, feeling trapped with this negative reputation of my hometown increased the influence other people had on me when they told me I should leave East Los Angeles, and I knew that the best way to do that was to leave the state.

## QUIERO VOLAR PERO TODAVIA NO PUEDO

*“I feel like sometimes I want to move away and never come back.”*

—Lourdes

*“I cry when people tell me I’m not good enough and that I’ll always be stuck here.”*

—Odalys

When Odalys announced she was going to ELAC, the first question she got was: “Why are you staying here?” There of course is privilege with leaving. Not everyone has the ability to leave, and not everyone has the same support to do so. Lourdes and Odalys both stayed in East LA for college and are currently living at home while they work and study full-time. For Odalys, financial circumstances impacted her ability to leave, despite receiving acceptances to UC Santa Cruz and Cal State Monterey Bay:

*I wanted to go far away, I considered out-of-state. My financial aid wasn’t enough to go to Santa Cruz or Monterey Bay right away so I had to stay at ELAC. I hate how money determines where I need to go. When I tell people I go to ELAC and that I’m still living at home, they assume I failed classes in high school or was too stupid to go anywhere else. My future is somewhere far away where I can escape the bullshit people assume of me. I want to start over.*

For Odalys, both financial circumstances and judgment from others impact her sense of entrapment and desire to leave. The negative discourses of East LA continue to surround her and have not allowed her to form a new *conocimiento* about her hometown. Additionally, she portrays how staying is seen as failure, creating a resentment towards the area because it is not

deemed to be ‘good enough’ to stay in. Odalys highlights that the assumption is not that one wanted to stay in the community, but that instead there must be some negative explanation that is behind staying at home. The resentment towards East LA therefore proves to not be completely self-imposed; rather, it is influenced by assumptions of why Chicanas stay in East LA.

The unfavorable remarks of staying in East LA do not only impact Chicanas’ perception of their hometown but also inhibit the self. In her poem, Lourdes wrote:

*I try my best to ignore people who try to talk shit about me staying in East LA but sometimes I start believing that I’m not good enough to go anywhere else.*

East LA has become a toxic environment for Lourdes; staying in East LA produces negative narratives about her, and she has internalized other people’s assumptions. Staying produces a sense of underachievement for Lourdes; therefore, East Los Angeles is the source of this feeling of ‘not being enough.’ Others create the negative discourses, but it is when one begins internalizing them that they create a feeling of shame in the self, as is discussed in the second part of cultivation theory.<sup>14</sup> Starting over in a new place seems like the best way to detach oneself from the damaging effects of the image of East LA, increasing the desire for Chicanas to leave and *comenzar de nuevo*.

## YA VOLE PERO QUIERO REGRESAR

*“You don’t realize you love something until it’s gone. That’s how I feel being 300 miles away from my community.”*

—Melissa

My mom always told me that to be successful, *uno tiene que volar*. Growing up, I was raised to believe that staying in East LA would not be good for my future. When I received acceptances to UC Berkeley, Haverford, and MIT, my teachers discarded my acceptances to schools nearer to my hometown. They told me to go as far away as possible, celebrating the fact that I was one in a handful who had the ability to leave.

However, coming to an unfamiliar space has made me realize how comfortable I was with my Chicana identity at home. Melissa and I both experienced a 'culture shock' when we arrived at our new 'homes' and suddenly, our Chicana identities were at odds. Feeling displaced in our new 'homes' forced us to think more about what it means to be Chicana, as Melissa states:

*In my city, I didn't think twice about playing Luis Coronel songs on full blast. I do that here and I see the white girls turning their heads; they were probably confused by my audacity to play a song in Spanish in the middle of [our dining center]. It's the little things like singing in Spanish or struggling to find good mole that [at Berkeley] ... make me miss East LA. I think being here has made me realize how normal it was to be myself back home.*

Leaving East LA meant leaving a place where we did not have to think about our identity as Chicanas. However, leaving also implies forming a new mestiza consciousness that impacts how we view our comunidad. Mestiza consciousness is to grow self-aware of one's mestiza identity: "[The new Mestiza] learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures."<sup>15</sup> Although we learned what it means to be Chicana in East LA because that is where we grew up with both of our cultures, mestiza consciousness required being away from home to realize just how much we have juggled our cultures. Embodying difference in our 'home away from home' has helped us realize the contradictions we took as normal back in East LA. Being away from our home forced us to see how we "stand at the crossroads where [we] can choose to balance the multiple and diverse cultures which inform [our] daily experiences and psyche."<sup>16</sup> While the balancing act deepens the 'herida' of our two cultures colliding, it also increases our appreciation for spaces where we can be ourselves and not constantly think about the 'difference' that our Chicana identity gives us.

Being away from my hometown and living in an unfamiliar place has helped me realize just how much East LA has shaped me and has helped me feel comfortable in my beautiful brown skin. Until I left, I took for granted

---

15 Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands -: La frontera*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

16 Holling, Michelle A. "The Critical Consciousness of Chicana and Latina Students." In *Chicana and Latina Education in Everyday Life*, 81-92. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.

the beautiful murals that embody the heart of the Mexican diaspora that I walked past daily, I took for granted being able to go to East LA's Mexican Independence Day parade every year, I took for granted speaking Spanglish with my friends and talking about both *Jane the Virgin* and *Amores Verdaderos*. Living in a predominantly-white and wealthy suburb at Haverford has made me conscious about how East Los Angeles is a Chicana spatial imaginary that is a "counter warrant against the white spatial imaginary,"<sup>17</sup> and the lack of spatial entitlement that Latinxs have at Haverford. Distance has showed me how East LA is a place of resistance to the white spatial imaginary and where my Chicana identity thrives without feeling difference within the area.

Furthermore, as I continue juggling two cultures, I have realized that although I am "ni de aqui, ni de alla," East Los Angeles has come to embody this borderlands imaginary for me. Like my interlocutors, I wrote a poem about East LA titled *Home, Hogar*:

*Yo se que mi hogar no esta en Mexico  
I know that my home is not in the United States  
Pero mi hogar está en el Eastside  
Where Mexico and the US come together and create a place that feels like  
Home.*

The mestiza consciousness that happened because of my distance to my hometown has altered where exactly I consider home. Even though East LA is in the United States, for me it represents a place resistant to the traditional American spatial imaginary, and instead, is a unique space that exists beyond the typical conception of an American area. It reflects what James Holston portrays as a "city citizenship," where people who typically are "in-between" cultures identify with the city they reside in, rather than identifying with an entirety of a nation-state.<sup>18</sup> For me, I identify with the East Los Angeles spatial imaginary because it embodies the essence of my two cultures and that is a space that cannot be created by nation-states. Ultimately, although the negative discourses of East LA still are in our minds, Melissa's and my mestiza consciousness has created a new sense of empowerment from our hometown that has changed our perspective on East LA, with distance being

---

17 Johnson, Gaye Theresa. *Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity: music, race, and spatial entitlement in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

18 Holston, James. *Cities and citizenship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

an essential part of that feeling.

### MI COMUNIDAD, MI CHICANIDAD, MI EDUCACIÓN

*"I thought all I'd be doing in college was studying biology and being in labs. And I am studying all that but I am also studying about me and my home. When I think about East LA now, I remember the history of it that I learned during my Intro to Chicano History course."*

—Melissa

I cannot remember a single time where I learned about East LA in high school. I learned more about the colonizers than about the colonized, more about wealthy white men than my ancestors. I did not expect college to be any different, I assumed none of my professors would even know about East LA or anything about my identity as a first-generation, low-income Chicana. I did not predict that higher education would be a space in which my knowledge from home would have any value in an academic setting.

Dolores Delgado Bernal describes the pedagogies of the home as, "[extending] the existing discourse on critical pedagogies by putting cultural knowledge and language at the forefront to better understand lessons from the home space and local communities."<sup>19</sup> Melissa exemplifies her realization of the pedagogies from East LA through her "Introduction to Chicano History":

*The coolest thing I've done at Berkeley was a presentation on East LA. I got to talk about the Chicano movement and the school walkouts in the 60s. I got to show all of my white classmates that I came from a place of brown power. Yeah I didn't have access to those fancy labs like they did. I still showed them that we're badass.... All the things I took for granted like all the work that East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice did with us at BGHS, I studied [during my project]. I know now that la lucha sigue at home.*

The "Introduction to Chicano History" course that Melissa took is already an example of critical pedagogy that defies dominant culture

---

19 Bernal, Dolores D. "Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home." In *Chicana and Latina Education in Everyday Life*, 113-29. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.

education, since Chicana history is rarely discussed in traditional educational curriculum. The course was a space for Melissa to explore the pedagogies of home she grew up with. By studying the history of her comunidad, she saw East LA as a place of historical brown resistance. Moreover, she realized that East LA continues being a space of resistance, highlighting an organization that works with East and Southeast LA high school students, involving them in forms of resistance against oppression. Although at the time, the organization was just an afterschool activity for both of us, it was one of the first spaces in which we learned to fight against the stereotypes people made of us and resist the injustices imposed on us. It is where we learned firsthand what resistance looks like. But it was not until we engaged in mestiza consciousness at college that we drew from las enseñanzas del Eastside. Additionally, not all classrooms utilize pedagogies of the home and mestiza consciousness knowledge production, but Melissa's "Introduction to Chicano History" course gave her the space to draw from those knowledge forms and deepen her appreciation for East Los Angeles. This knowledge resists the negative discourses produced about East Los Angeles and creates a counternarrative that produces empowerment, rather than shame, about our hometown.

## LA MARIPOSA QUE VOLO Y CAMBIO

*"Aunque este 3000 millas lejos de casa, mi ciudad siempre sera uno de mis primeros amores. Like most love stories, it was not love at first sight, but a love that flourished in a place people never thought love could grow from."*

—Leslie

When I left East LA, I did not imagine ever talking about where I am from. Yet, here I am, 3000 miles away from home producing a mixtape about mi comunidad and talking about how it has shaped who I am. But like most forms of growing, it comes with time. Like Melissa, exploring my community through courses has deepened my understanding of my comunidad, both through learning its history but also seeing the forms of resistance I grew up with.

During my writing seminar, I wrote an anthology of short stories and poems, capturing my formative years in Los Angeles. While I began taking an interest in exploring East LA, the stigmatization of my community was still highly prevalent in my mind and is shown through the poem, *Growing up Numb in East Los Angeles*:



*Numbness helps me sleep at night,  
Even when I can hear the shouts and the fights  
Even when I can hear the police and ambulance sirens  
... Even when I know that this is not normal  
But when you are numb,  
And know no other type of life,  
You try to pretend that everything is fine.  
Because that is the only way to get out of East LA  
You must keep going to find an exit...*

My writing seminar let me explore my emotions towards East LA, and it was the first time I thought about my community in an academic setting. It marks the beginning of my educational journey about East LA, a beginning that demonstrates the influences of negative discourses and representations on my thoughts. But it is also the beginning of critically analyzing lived experiences, which is a crucial part of gaining a new sense of consciousness as Michelle Holling states: “Creating pedagogical assignments that have Chicanas and Latinas center and critically analyze particular lived experiences, while identifying the ideologies and beliefs that shape those experiences, heightens their sense of consciousness. The importance of consciousness is that it is a necessary step to becoming cognitive subjects, who recognize and resist oppression.”<sup>20</sup> Throughout my anthology, I also wrote about the factors that contribute to increased crime rates and poverty, including systematic oppression towards Latinxs and Los Angeles’s history of urban segregation. In my journey of *conocimiento* of East LA, I had to be critical of the factors that have led to negative representations.

As I continued learning about the causes of East LA’s stigmatization, I was upset about the external factors that contributed to it. In my “Latino/as Culture and the Art of Undocumented Migration” course, there was a unit on East LA, and I was giving a presentation on it. I talked to my professor about my frustration with how East LA is portrayed and that I felt like I could not do anything about it. She told me that the best way of fighting a bad narrative was to create a counternarrative—to tell my story of growing up in East LA and how it has shaped me. Through storytelling during my presentation, I

---

20 Holling, Michelle A. “The Critical Consciousness of Chicana and Latina Students.” In *Chicana and Latina Education in Everyday Life*, 81-92. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.

employed a form of knowledge production that countered the dominant discourse on East LA. Storytelling helped me “reveal the construction of [my] identity as well as of life experiences that provide insight into the world [I] live in.”<sup>21</sup>

In my presentation, I talked about a recent walkout at my high school protesting the laying off of dozens of teachers and staff, led by Chicana activists. I talked about the organization and leadership exemplified by over 300 students at my school and how significant it was for Chicanas in my hometown to be inspired by our history of resistance. Their strength, leadership, and determination were heavily influenced by growing up in a place of brown power and resistance. The more I learned about the motivation of these student activists, the more I learned about myself. Producing a counternarrative helped me evaluate the construction of my identity while also resisting the dominant narratives I grew up with. Developing my own knowledge production through storytelling shows the ways in which education has given me the space to grow my mestiza consciousness and challenge the stigmatization of my hometown.

## CONCLUSION

I write this last section at a small coffee shop in my hometown, and on my way here, I walked past the “Virgin’s Seed” mural on Hammel Street. I have walked past this mural dozens of times before, but it was the first time I stopped and admired the Mexicanidad it radiates. Coming into the coffee shop, I was greeted with the sounds of both English and Spanish voices and the smell of chocolate abuelita and churros. These are locations that for 18 years I took for granted, but now being back, a deeper appreciation has emerged from being so far away from home and learning about my community in my courses. Learning about my community has helped me learn about myself and how transformative East Los Angeles has been on my identity.

Although my friends and I all envision our futures in very different places, we have one thing in common: our commitment to our raza. Melissa hopes to work as a doctor in a Latinx community, Odalys hopes to be a social worker in low-income, people of color communities, and Lourdes wants to

---

21 II

become a forensic anthropologist and work in border towns to help Latinx families find remains of their loved ones who crossed the US-Mexico border. We do not all envision staying in East LA to accomplish these goals, but our goals reflect the influence of East LA's Latinidad that has inspired us to serve our Latinx comunidad. Despite all the negative discourses, our comunidad has let us explore our Chicanidad, feel comfortable with being stuck in-between two cultures, and learn what resistance looks like. East LA is not perfect, but it is the beautiful Chicanx spatial imaginary that has shaped who we are. East LA is our hogar.

### ***MI CIUDAD, MI AMOR***

*Yo vengo de la parte de Los Angeles mas bella*

*I am from a community with the most hard-working people I have ever met*  
*Yo vengo del Este de la ciudad de Los Angeles, donde viven los angeles que me*  
*han enseñado como sonar y volar*

*I am from a place that has given me the wings to fly and has taught me how*  
*to succeed*

*Yo vengo de la ciudad donde mi cultura domina el lugar y demuestra su*  
*belleza en el arte, en la música, y en la gente*

*Yo soy del Este de Los Angeles, y aunque he volado 3000 millas, siempre*  
*regresare a mi bella ciudad.*

## APPENDIX I

### I Am Poem

I am Odalys and I am from Bell Gardens.  
I wonder what it would be like to go to live in West LA  
I hear the news about our city and it makes me sad  
I see that other people think we're ghetto  
I want to live in Santa Barbara someday  
I am Odalys and I am from Bell Gardens.

I pretend that I don't care about what people say about us  
I feel like I let down my family because I went to ELAC  
I like when I am with my friends and family in the city  
I worry I'll be stuck here  
I cry when people tell me I'm not good enough and that I'll always be stuck here  
I am Odalys and I am from Bell Gardens

I understand my city is not as ghetto and bad as people make it seem  
I say I'm going to ignore all the bad stereotypes but it's harder than it seems  
I dream that I will graduate college and take my family with me to Santa Barbara  
I try my best to ignore all the haters  
I hope my city will not be seen as bad in the future  
I am Odalys and I am from Bell Gardens.

## APPENDIX II

### I Am Poem

[Because I don't know how to write anything else]

I am Lourdes and I am from East LA  
I wonder if I will be able to transfer out of ELAC in three years and go to NYU  
I hear gunshots on weekend nights  
I see my family and friends come together on the weekends  
I want to live in New York someday  
I am Lourdes and I am from East LA

I pretend like I'm happy being at a community college

I feel like sometimes I want to move far away and never come back  
I touch my laptop as I look for courses to enroll in for the winter semester but  
they are all already full  
I worry I won't be able to take the classes I need to transfer in three years  
I cry when I think about how hard it is going to be to transfer within three years  
I am Lourdes and I am from East LA

I understand I need to stay here for my family  
I say that someday, I'll be able to take my parents to New York with me  
I dream of transferring to NYU and majoring in forensic science  
I try my best to be happy at ELAC and remind myself that I WILL transfer eventually  
I hope I can get into the classes I want next semester and get back on track  
I am Lourdes and I am from East LA

### APPENDIX III

## ***EAST LA WALKOUT (1968)***



(1968) Chicana  
leadership at East LA  
Walkout

### APPENDIX IV

#### **List of Tasks:**

Task #1: Write a poem about East Los Angeles. It does not have to be any specific type or form. Be as creative as you want.

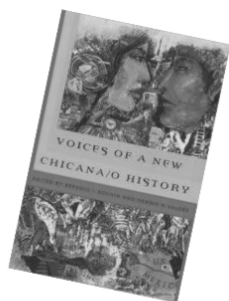
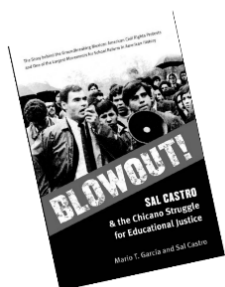
Task #2: This is a freewrite exercise that is surrounding a prompt. Please

write for 7 minutes consecutively to answer the prompt. Do not worry about the coherence or structure of the response. There are two prompts but use 7-minutes for each one. The two prompts are:

1. When you think of your city, what comes to mind?
2. Where do you want to be in the future? What place do you hope to call your home?

Task #3: Search for three images of East LA that you believe best represent your hometown. Feel free to search on the Internet or draw images.

### MY HISTORY IS IN THESE BOOKS!



---

# New Visions of ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Local’: Vancouver and New York City Chinatown’s Asian Immigrant Food Networks

Rebecca Chang '19

## ABSTRACT

In an ever-growing age of environmentalism, concepts such as 'sustainability' and 'local' have become ubiquitous in our everyday language. But what do those concepts mean and how can they unintentionally exclude groups that fall outside the dominant racial and socioeconomic narratives of the environmentalism movement? This paper aims to challenge traditional understandings of sustainability and locality through two case studies of Asian immigrant food networks in Vancouver, Canada and New York City, United States. Largely composed of small businesses, both cases highlight food networks that have operated alongside and against traditional mainstream food chains, and in turn, demonstrate the ways in which sustainability may not always line up with Western, scientific understandings, and that ideas of locality should be expanded past solely geographical proximity.

## INTRODUCTION

Food is inextricably tied to our existence. In a very literal sense, food provides the sustenance we need for survival, but beyond this, food serves a symbolic capacity in offering comfort, creating shared links of heritage, and expressing social messages. As we live in a time when labels of 'local food' and the importance of 'sustainability' have become ubiquitous, the critique of these terms and concepts become evermore important.

Which foods are deemed 'local'? Which are not? What connotations are associated with 'local' or sustainability? Who has access to sustainable and local foods? I answer these questions through challenging traditional definitions of these terms demonstrated in the examination of Asian immigrant community food networks. New York City and Vancouver, two major North American urban areas with large Asian populations, represent two contrasting cases of simultaneous existence and resistance alongside mainstream food economies. They both serve as examples of economic and social sustainability, as well as complicate the meaning of locality through proposing an alternate understanding based on heritage foods.

In order to tackle these themes, this paper will first begin with background information on various theoretical frameworks and practical applications of sustainability and locality. Afterwards, the two case studies will discuss general historical trends of Asian migration to Vancouver and New York, in addition to the role of immigrant food networks in relation



to the global modern food economy. Lastly, I will close with an analytical comparison and concluding thoughts.

## CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SUSTAINABILITY AND LOCALITY

In their introduction to an edited volume on sustainability, scholars Checker, McDonogh, and Isenhour (2015) assert that “sustainability has become a call to arms, a catchword, and a slogan,” (p.1) alluding to questions of branding and activism associated with the term. However, while sustainability is most commonly connected to ecological concerns, a number of scholars have pushed for an expansion of its definition to encompass economic security and social equity. In order to capture the application of the three pillars of sustainability—ecological, economic, and social—Checker et al. (2015) provide the two ideas of “universalized conceptualizations and particularized local practices” (p.2), to refer to the myriad of ways in which individuals or societies choose to apply these universal pillars to their particular local communities.

The case of Delhi’s *dhobis*, or washerpeople, discussed in the volume provides an emblematic example. When the Indian government forced the *dhobis* to convert their laundry methods to a different, more supposedly modern and sustainable form, many older *dhobis* reacted in frustration (Patel, 2015). Despite the integration of technology, the new techniques were shown to be more wasteful, while traditional methods conserved more water, and were thus more ‘green’ (Patel, 2015). Consequently, this case critiques the superiority of Western standards of sustainability, and reinforces the importance of local practices and knowledge.

In the case study of the *dhobis* and others, Checker et al. (2015) emphasize the use of ethnographies to understand the localized ways in which people in varying contexts understand and picture sustainability in relation to their everyday world. This is especially important since the foundation of my main sources lies in ethnographic research materials conducted by other scholars.

The issue of ‘local’ food and the broader concept of ‘locality’ presents another area of further clarification. Oftentimes, ‘locality’ is defined geographically, and consequently ‘local’ food is described in terms of distance between the producer and consumer. Examples are most commonly displayed in farmers’ markets and urban gardens that include small-scale farmers, serve as beneficial sources of fresh produce in food deserts, and

increase socialization among community members (Bubinas, 2015).

However, the usage of this term has negative consequences. The first is that in equating locality with positive connotations of progressiveness and desirability, the term becomes framed in opposition to globality, leading to the potential of nativist backlash and a xenophobic exclusion of non-local 'others' (Hinrichs, 2003). Another unintended consequence is the dominance of white narratives in framing local food initiatives as for the benefit of communities of color when this may not actually be the case (Guthman, 2008). For instance, the expectation of a universal desire to 'get your hands dirty' particularly from white-led local gardening initiatives carries a significant weight when considering histories of forced, uncompensated, or unfairly compensated farm labor in communities of color (Guthman, 2008).

For Asian farmers specifically, food scholars Minkoff-Zern, Peluso, Sowerwine, and Getz (2011) use the phrase "agricultural racial formation" to link institutional cases of state-sanctioned restrictions faced by Chinese, Japanese, and Hmong farmers at different historical points. For each ethnic group, the authors cite the specific examples of the ban on Chinese migration in the 1860s, Japanese internment and confiscation of their land during the World War II era, and the negative impact of current labor laws on small-scale Hmong farmers. As a result, these state-sanctioned policies serve as an avenue to explain Asian growers' lack of engagement in the global food economy or local food movements, in addition to potential language and cultural barriers.

This brings me to question whether there are alternative definitions of locality or local food that are more expansive or inclusive of migrant experiences and other communities of color. In interviews with Filipino migrants, sociologist Valiente-Neighbours (2012) found four varying definitions of 'local': (1) geography-based, referring to geographically proximate foods; (2) U.S.-based, referring to American food, junk food, or fast food; (3) community-based, referring to food found in specific neighborhoods; and (4) immigrant identity-based, referring to Filipino produce and culinary traditions. I would like especially to draw attention to the fourth definition that demonstrates the mobile nature of locality embodied in migrants' lived experiences. While this may contradict the environmental benefits derived from closing distances between the producer and consumer, Valiente-Neighbours (2012) emphasizes that the definition is not meant to completely substitute its traditional meaning, but to expand the concept of locality.

As a result, when I refer to local food in my paper, I choose to recognize the limitations that exist in current iterations of local food movements in terms of

their exclusivity, and bring a combination of both its traditional geographic distance definition and Valiente-Neighbour's (2012) additional definition of immigrant identity-based food.

## HISTORICAL ASIAN IMMIGRATION TO NORTH AMERICA

The first major wave of migration to North America in the mid-to-late 1800s was marked by the California Gold Rush and the construction of railroads, leading to the establishment of Asian immigrant communities in West Coast cities such as San Francisco and Vancouver. This period was soon followed by the enactment of legislation that heavily restricted, and then banned, immigration from various parts of Asia. Despite the bans, Asian migration continued, and over time, many immigrants also chose to move eastward to cities such as New York to pursue job opportunities (Lee, 2015).

The second major wave of immigration, starting in the 1960s and continuing until today, was spurred by the repeal of past bans and a revision of immigration laws: the United States implemented a number of family reunification policies while Canada enacted a points-based system based on skills and professional background. Both have led to exponential increases in Asian immigration and population. Although the Vancouver metropolitan area has an Asian population<sup>1</sup> that is four times as large as that of the New York metropolitan area today—44% and 11%, respectively—Asian ethnic enclaves and immigrants have had significant impacts on both metropolitan areas (Census Reporter 2016; Statistics Canada, 2017).

## THE WORLD FOOD ECONOMY

The current wave of increased Asian immigration to North America has aligned with the tail end of the expansion and corporatization of the world

---

1 I chose to use general Asian ethnicity statistics in order to use a broader statistic that would encompass subsequent-generation immigrants that may still participate in Asian food networks despite not being immigrants themselves. Additionally, I used statistics corresponding to metropolitan areas due to consistency, as Vancouver's statistics were not available for the city itself. The Asian ethnicity statistic may also exclude those who are multiracial or multiethnic.

food economy. This expansion can be attributed to key factors such as state-supported expansion of the agriculture industry, liberal laws and policies, increasing transnational corporate involvement, and the “financialization [sic] of food” (Clapp, 2014, p. 11). As a result, in these past decades, there has been a rise in food corporations such as Kraft Foods or Tyson that own numerous subsidiary companies as well as food product and agriculture subsectors (Hess, 2014).

Asian immigrant food networks<sup>2</sup> are an especially interesting case study in comparison to the corporatized, mainstream methods of food production and distribution because they have still been able to subsist alongside by relying on shared ethnicity, language, and personal connections. Largely composed of small businesses, they draw a sharp contrast to the large corporations that currently engage in food production through much more formal economic considerations of the market, a theme that will be further explored through each of the case studies (Imbruce, 2015).

## CASE STUDY I: VANCOUVER, CANADA

After railroad and gold mining both dwindled down, many Asian migrants in Vancouver shifted to farming as a profession during the early twentieth century, as many had come from that background in their home countries. However, in light of the shift in immigration policies in the 1960s, there emerged a growing Asian migrant population and demand for ethnic produce, leading these farmers to take advantage of their occupation (Gibb & Wittman, 2013). As of the early 21st century, Asian farmers form an integral part of their industry, and as of 2006, made up the industry’s largest visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Traditionally, Canadian farmers operate on a much larger scale, with an average plot size of 778 acres, in comparison to Asian farmers with an

---

2 While both Vancouver and New York City have large populations of a number of Asian sub-ethnic populations, the literature on food networks is quite limited, and focuses most on examples of Chinese-American and Chinese-Canadian food networks. As a result, I wish to highlight that this paper does not fully encapsulate all forms of Asian immigrant food networks, given the diversity within the label. At the same time, however, I want to acknowledge from personal observation, there is some degree of intersection in sub-ethnic food networks.

average plot size of 39 acres (Gibb & Wittman, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2016). Another indicator of the small-scale nature of Asian-owned farms is their tendency to hire ten or fewer employees, along with their focus on human-intensive, rather than machine-centered methods (Gibb, 2011).

Asian farmers also differ in terms of their preferred post-production distribution process. Conventionally, large corporate wholesalers purchase produce from farmers to sell to large retail chains or stores. This process depends on produce of long-lasting quality to ensure freshness upon arrival to retail destinations, which poses a problem for many Asian farmers whose production is not highly mechanized, leading to a shorter duration of produce freshness (Gibb, 2011). Additionally, payment for produce is often delayed by a few weeks since wholesalers need to make one more sale to retailers, creating another shortcoming for small-scale Asian farmers who operate on comparatively less capital (Gibb, 2011).

As a result, Asian farmers more commonly utilize distribution methods of greengrocers and farm-owned roadside stands. Greengrocers are small, retail markets with specialized product offerings that seek out Asian produce from Vancouver-area farmers (Gibb, 2011). Because they purchase produce for immediate sale, greengrocers are able to offer payment upon delivery (Gibb, 2011).

Farm-owned roadside stands, as indicated in the name, are operated by farms themselves and commonly attract local consumers seeking affordable and fresh produce. These stands were thought to have started in the 1970s, stemming from negative experiences with white wholesalers who underpaid or did not pay Asian farmers (Gibb & Wittman, 2013). Later on, these roadside stands became profitable and were adopted by other Asian farmers because they earned more compared to what was received from wholesalers and greengrocers (Gibb, 2011).<sup>3</sup>

---

3 Given Asian-Canadian farmers' participation in farm-owned roadside stands, their lack of presence in farmers' markets may seem puzzling. Gibb (2011)'s interviewees attribute a number of factors, such as prior experiences of discrimination, a distrust of other vendors, and a feeling of discomfort from the expectation for imperfect or flawed produce. The latter point demonstrates the contradiction in a desire for imperfection in non-corporate farm-produced food, but is of concern to farmers due to a history of Asian farmers being stereotyped as unsanitary and cheap (Gibb, 2011). This reiterates one of the points expressed earlier about the lack of underrepresented groups in the local food movement attributed to a need to examine more critically the effect of race and culture on food justice.

Consequently, shared ethnic connections and demand among farmers, wholesalers, greengrocers, and customers have become crucial mechanisms for the survival and parallel existence of Vancouver's Asian immigrant food network. While neither greengrocers nor farm-owned roadside stands are uncommon in the agriculture industry, especially among small-scale farmers, I want to highlight the dimension of social sustainability that is formed through these distribution methods. These sales are based upon social relationships of shared ethnicity and language, a similar theme that will be discussed in the New York case study. Furthermore, they represent how techniques that originated as tactics of survival against bankruptcy or discrimination have evolved into ways to create relationships within Vancouver's Asian population.

## CASE STUDY II: NEW YORK CITY, UNITED STATES

New York City's Chinatown is important historically as the first Chinese enclave on the East Coast and has expanded into one of the key Asian centers of the city. Unlike the case study of Vancouver in which greengrocers and markets were part of a tight geographic network of farmers, wholesalers, and retailers, the farmers who supply produce have been located outside the city in Long Island, New York; South Florida; and Comayagua, Honduras. However, New York City is still significant as the crossroads for produce that comes from these locations and is either sold in markets and groceries or redirected to other East Coast cities, such as Philadelphia and Boston (Imbruce, 2015). Following a similar form to Vancouver's case study, I will start with a characterization of the production process and the farmers involved in growing Asian produce and then move on to post-production and the retailers.

North Fork, Long Island, the closest of the locations, is located roughly two hours from the city, and is highlighted by Imbruce (2015) as the location of Sang Lee Farms, the area's oldest Chinese vegetable farm. While the farm was founded in the 1940s, and at the time specialized in production for wholesale distribution to much of the Eastern Seaboard from Montreal to Miami, as of 2002, the founders' sons decided to cut off ties with Chinatown

because of the overly stiff competition and desire to pursue organic farming (“About Us,” n.d.; Imbruce, 2015). Due to the winter offseason in Long Island, a number of farms originally established in Long Island founded offshoots in South Florida to take advantage of the longer growing season (Imbruce, 2015).

Imbruce (2015) profiles three of the largest farms producing Asian produce in Palm Beach County that are of similar acreage size—around 1,000 acres—and are well-known for supplying leafy vegetables. However, alongside these three large farms are also numerous small, family gardens known as homegardens that specialize in producing tropical fruits, located just south of Palm Beach County in the city of Homestead.

The defining characteristic of homegardens is the use of vertical stratification, which plants trees and crops together into a unique ecosystem, and is distinct from the more common practice of mono-cropping, where each crop is planted into separate plots. Many of these small homegardens are operated and owned by Filipino and Thai immigrants who were attracted by the area’s tropical climate and interested in growing produce from their culture (Imbruce, 2007). The homegardens are on average about 20 acres and employ five permanent workers per farm, along with extra seasonal workers during peak times (Imbruce, 2007). Rather than focusing on the more popular leafy greens that other Florida or Honduras farmers grow, homegardens benefit from the advantages of a warm tropical-like climate unlike any other region of the United States, which allows them to grow tropical fruits that are often in high demand (Imbruce, 2007).

In addition to their varied crops, growers of homegardens have differing methods of selling their produce. Many of Imbruce (2007)’s interviewees preferred local sales to people in the surrounding community, since they were able to determine their own prices, but some also expressed that frequent small orders could be cumbersome. Others mentioned that they sometimes deliver produce to restaurants and markets in the Miami area, but were unsure of the required time and commitment (Imbruce, 2007). As a result, many preferred utilizing co-ethnic wholesalers or brokers who sold their produce for them to other East Coast cities (Imbruce, 2007). In order to ship produce north in larger quantities, growers often collaborate with community members, including other part-time farmers or even elderly foragers of wild tropical fruit, in order to fulfill a large order (Imbruce, 2007).

The third common production site of New York City’s Asian produce is the Comayagua Valley, Honduras, located in the central-western portion of the country. Asian produce was introduced in the 1980s following issues in the

agricultural industry there and in the Dominican Republic (Imbruce, 2015). Due to the small network of wholesalers, wholesalers were able to encourage production of crops “that were counterseasonal to other production sites [in Long Island or Florida] or that were too labor intensive to grow in Florida to avoid market saturation” (Imbruce, 2015, p. 104), to Honduran farmers. This led to the creation of a carefully regulated and stable market, in comparison to the overly saturated Honduran cash crop markets for onions, beans, and corn (Imbruce, 2015). In fact, 93% of Imbruce (2015)’s interviewees expressed a preference for Asian vegetables due to their higher profitability.

Unlike in Vancouver where farmers were able to sell their produce directly to greengrocers or roadside stands, wholesalers—also known as brokerage firms—are a very prominent part of New York City’s Asian food network. These wholesalers serve as the connection between farmers and retailers, often building on already existing social relationships or forming new ones based on shared ethnicity or language. There are also expectations that wholesalers “take care” of the farmers they represent, not only serving as a purchaser of the farmer’s produce, but also giving them good prices and advice on market demands (Imbruce, 2015).

Additionally, the role of wholesalers is to receive produce from ports such as Newark and Miami and truck it to warehouses in Brooklyn and Manhattan before being sold to retailers (Imbruce, 2015). This often bypasses New York’s formal food distribution network that is centralized in Hunts Point Terminal Market in the South Bronx, leading to more concentrated pathways in Manhattan and Brooklyn (Imbruce, 2015). This means that farmers, wholesalers, and retailers are all very interdependent on each other for business to go smoothly, as indicated by this anecdote:

*One farmer<sup>4</sup> who supplies a Chinatown wholesaler told me that he had a 25 percent decline in his sales one week that it was bitter cold in New York and the street vendors could not withstand working outside. (Imbruce, 2015, p. 31)*

These wholesalers then sell produce to their retailers and continuously restock in small quantities during the day depending on demand.

During Imbruce’s (2015) fieldwork between 2003 and 2005, she noted a total of 88 different produce markets but considered the 47 that she saw

---

4 It is left unclear by Imbruce where the farmer was located.



consistently as permanent. Of these, the most common types were markets, storefronts, and street vendors. Markets utilized inside and outside space to sell different products and both areas were owned by the same person or company (Imbruce, 2015). In contrast, storefronts were outside spaces rented out by indoor stores to vendors to sell produce (Imbruce, 2015). Lastly, street vendors operated on sidewalks with significant foot traffic (Imbruce, 2015). Most of the retailers were operated on a very small-scale<sup>5</sup> basis by mostly first-generation immigrants who speak limited or no English. The informal nature of these retailers, especially street vendors, creates quick, small transactions between their consumers and them, which are common throughout Chinatown.

In each step of New York City's chain of interactions from grower, wholesaler, retailer, and consumer, the Asian immigrant food network draws on many similarities with the Vancouver case in the creation of social sustainability. Small businesses and individuals embedded within these chains are able to participate in commerce using their ethnic language, and also are in tune to the demands of both growers and consumers.

## ANALYSIS & COMPARISON

In comparing the case studies of Vancouver and New York Chinatown's Asian immigrant food networks, I find that there is a sense of 'local' in the formal geographic definition as well as Valiente-Neighbour's (2012) definition of immigrant-based identity. Despite the reluctance to participate in farmers' markets, Vancouver's Chinese-Canadian farm-owned roadside stands demonstrate that farmers are indeed engaging with nearby residents through selling their produce. While they do not advertise themselves as 'local' sources of fresh produce or identify as farmers' markets, they are able to shorten the distance between producers and consumers, fulfilling the geographic definition of 'local.'

In contrast, Chinatown's Asian immigrant food network is not as much of an example of geographically proximate food as that of Vancouver. However, portions of the network such as the Southeast Asian homegardens

---

5 In my personal experience, having spent time in Chinatown, the number of people working at these retailers usually ranges from one to ten.

in Homestead, Florida, engage in their own forms of supplying produce locally to residents who visit the farm or are in the Miami area. Because some of the growers mentioned the difficulty in delivering by truck to Miami, perhaps this could be an area for further infrastructure support for small-scale farmers.

As for Valiente-Neighbour's (2012) definition of immigrant-based identity 'local' food, both cases supply consumers with cultural variants of produce that may not be easily found in large-chain supermarkets and indirectly assist in preserving immigrant culinary traditions. As expressed earlier, for many farmers, growing Asian vegetables is an economically viable choice because of the stability of the market conveyed through tight-knit relationships between all the actors. Additionally, the quick grow cycle and low start-up costs of growing Asian vegetables and fruits means that farmers, especially those who are immigrants with few economic resources, can "achieve the intensive production levels required to operate an economically viable farm" (Gibb, 2011, p. 49). In addition to farmers and growers, the Asian immigrant food network creates economic security and sustainability through the number of jobs available in the packing, wholesale, and retail subsectors that are integral to its operation.

Both Vancouver and Chinatown's networks also provide opportunities for Asian farmers to participate in a robust food economy separate from the mainstream global economy and current iterations of the 'local' food movement that do not put much emphasis on the factors of shared ethnicity and language, or may not be inclusive enough to Asian farmers. Rather, we see the versatility of the industry through its tight-knit nature based on close, informal, and interpersonal relationships among retailers, wholesalers, and farmers. While both Vancouver and Chinatown's food networks are not perfect examples of social equity and social sustainability, they provide opportunities and access to farming and the food industry that are not possible through other more mainstream avenues.

To sum up, the case studies of Vancouver and Chinatown's Asian immigrant food networks can be used as lenses to challenge our current definitions of 'sustainability' and 'local' that may often be too narrow to include efforts by communities of color and other ethnic groups. The existence of these food networks in parallel to global food economies demonstrate their persistence for survival in addition to the very different needs that they serve, which cannot be fulfilled by their global, mainstream versions.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- About Us. (n.d.). Retrieved December 14, 2017, from <https://www.sangleefarms.com/our-story/>
- Census Reporter. (2016). Census profile: New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area. Retrieved December 11, 2017, from <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US35620-new-york-newark-jersey-city-ny-nj-pa-metro-area>
- Checker, M., McDonogh, G., & Isenhour, C. (2016). Introduction: Urban Sustainability as Myth and Practice. In *Sustainability in the Global City: Myth and Practice* (pp. 1–28). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Clapp, J. (2013). *Food*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gibb, N. (2011). *Parallel alternatives: Chinese-Canadian farmers and the Metro Vancouver local food movement*. McGill University, Montreal.
- Gibb, N., & Wittman, H. (2013). Parallel alternatives: Chinese-Canadian farmers and the Metro Vancouver local food movement. *Local Environment*, 18(1), 1–19.
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(1), 431–447.
- Harvey, D. (1996). Cities or Urbanization. *City*, 1(1/2), 38–61.
- Hess, A. (2014, August 16). Companies that control the world's food. *USA TODAY*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/08/16/companies-that-control-the-worlds-food/14056133/>
- Hinrichs, C. (33-45). The practice and politics of food system localization. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1), 2003.
- Imbruce, V. (2007). Bringing Southeast Asia to the Southeast United States: New forms of alternative agriculture in Homestead, Florida. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 24(1), 41–59.
- Imbruce, V. (2015). *From Farm to Canal Street: Chinatown's Alternative Food Network in the Global Marketplace*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lee, E. (2015). *The Making of Asian America*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Minkoff-Zern, L.-A., Peluso, N., Sowerwine, J., & Getz, C. (2011). Race and Regulation: Asian Immigrants in California Agriculture. In A. H. Alkon & J. Agyeman (Eds.), *Cultivating Food Justice* (pp. 65–85). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Patel, V. (2015). Going Green? Washing Stones in World-Class Delhi. In C. Isenhour, G. McDonogh, & M. Checker (Eds.), *Sustainability in*

*the Global City: Myth and Practice* (pp. 82–101). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Statistics Canada. (2016, January 25). Snapshot of Canadian Agriculture: Chapter 1. Retrieved December 13, 2017, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2011001/p1/p1-01-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. (2017, February 8). Census Profile, 2016 Census - Vancouver [Census metropolitan area], British Columbia and British Columbia [Province]. Retrieved December 11, 2017, from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=933&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=Vancouver&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All>

Valiente-Neighbours, J. M. (2012). “Mobility, embodiment, and scales: Filipino immigrant perspectives on local food.” *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(1), 531–541.

---

# Forced Cultural Distance and the African Diaspora: Exploring Black Identity in “Notes for a Speech” and “To the Diaspora”

Sierra Zareck '20

Black Americans occupy a unique space in their cultural understanding of themselves. While their ancestors did come from Africa, they were forcibly taken from their homes during slavery. As a result, a diaspora was created. Black people were spread out worldwide and distanced from their original culture through force, so new, hybrid cultures emerged. This has created a type of cultural agony for black people in the diaspora trying to reconcile their identity with an understanding of how they are related to Africa and their roots. The African-American poets Amiri Baraka and Gwendolyn Brooks grapple with this in their poetry. Both were a part of the Black Arts movement in the 1960s, sometimes called the artistic sister of the Black Power movement. In his poem "Notes for a Speech," Baraka writes of how, despite his ancestry, he is not in any way connected to Africa. Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "To the Diaspora" is a salve to the wound of forced cultural distance that Baraka's "Notes for a Speech" shows through a pervading sense of cultural abandonment. Brooks' poem is made for those in the diaspora like Baraka, lost in their connection to Africa and tormented by its foreignness. "To the Diaspora" professes all black people are "Africa" too, illustrated through Brooks' take on the call-and-response form. In "To the Diaspora," Brooks attempts to help people of the African diaspora, like Baraka, who are anguished by their forced cultural distance from Africa and a perceived external cultural rejection, to find a cultural peace within their own identity through their own internal acceptance.

In "Notes for a Speech," Baraka starts off by speaking about his own experiences of feeling Africa to be unknown and foreign to him. He writes that the "African blues" do not know him and "Their steps [are], in sands / of their own / land" (Baraka 1-4). Baraka feels distanced from Africa and makes that apparent right from the start. To him it is "A country / in black & white"—a country which he has only seen in newspapers, which "Does / not feel / what I am" (Baraka 4-5, 7-9). Baraka utilizes enjambment in the first stanza and all throughout the poem to bring emphasis to certain lines. "Does not know me" is separated from "African blues" by a line break, even though they are within the same sentence. By doing this, Baraka emphasizes "does not know me," to add strength behind his claim that Africa is foreign to him. In the first stanza he also makes distinct his separation from Africa through his use of "their": it is "their steps" in the sand "of their own land." He never says 'we.' Baraka uses narrative perspective here to show separation from this aspect of his identity. "Of their own" is separated in its own line as well, increasing its scope. It is not only the "steps" in the sand that are apart from Baraka, but Africa as a people, a culture, a consciousness.

Baraka utilizes transitions between stanzas to attempt to show that he is still strong without this Africa. In between the first and second stanza, he makes the word "Strength" its own line (Baraka 10). By doing this, the strength becomes both an extrapolation of the last sentence of the first stanza and the beginning of the second stanza, forming a transition. The last sentence of the first stanza says Africa is a country that "Does / not feel / what I am" (Baraka 7-9). The next line contains only the word "Strength," which is oriented to the right of the page and singled out as a result of this emphasized enjambment. By following immediately after the previous line—"what I am"—"Strength" becomes a description of Baraka himself (Baraka 9). "What I am" is strength he says, even without Africa.

Baraka goes on to show how, although he says he is strong without Africa, he is actually hurt and angered by what he believes is its rejection. The second stanza, after the word "Strength," describes a dream state where Baraka confronts the people of the Africa he does not know. Baraka is "in the dream," where the "wind/ throws up sand" and "eyes / are something locked in / hate, of hate, of hate" (Baraka 11-14). Since he had said before that the African blues have steps in the sand, connected also by the rhyming between "sands" and "land," it is known that "the wind throws up sand" is a reference back to Africa. Baraka believes they are throwing up sand, concealing his vision and blocking him from cultural acceptance. He continues to describe this perceived external rejection by Africa, saying the eyes are locked "in hate" and "of hate" for "they conduct / their deaths apart / from my own" says Baraka. (Baraka 16-18). The eyes of Africa hate him because is not of them, for they hate "to walk abroad." He has been denied a cultural peace with Africa, or so he believes.

Furthermore, in the second and third stanzas, Baraka juxtaposes his anger and the feeling of external cultural rejection by exploring the loss of agency in his relationship with Africa. He hates that he cannot control Africa's hostility towards him based on the forced migration of slavery and the separation it caused. In the latter part of the second stanza, he describes "Those / heads I call / my 'people'" (Baraka 18-20). "People" is in quotes, for Baraka does not call Africa his people. "My 'people'" is also on its own line to add emphasis, another example of enjambment. The stanza ends with this sarcastic claiming of Baraka's "people," which is more of a rejection of the belief of a connection than an outright denial. This sarcasm has a note of bitterness to it; they are not his "people," because in Baraka's mind, they hate him. Despite the "strength" Baraka says he has, there is an anger at a perceived lack of agency in whether he is a part of "Africa." Those eyes hate

him, but he feels he has no control over that. Baraka moves on to wonder about Africa, showing how truly distant he feels from it as a cultural identity. The transition to the third and final stanza changes the narrative audience, altering the atmosphere from an internal declaration to an external critique rife with questions. Baraka writes, “And who are they. People. To concern” (Baraka 21). Here Baraka takes a full sentence and breaks it up not only with enjambment but also with intermittent periods, orienting it to the right of the page. This adds even more emphasis to the sentence and its significance in the poem. The phrase “And who are they” has a period after it, isolating it as it captures the entire question of the poem: who are they, who is Africa? All these “people” have caused Baraka grief and cultural confusion in their perceived rejection. He does not know them, and that is the saddest part of all.

In the third and last stanza Baraka shifts his focus to whiteness, how he relates to it, and how that affects “Africa’s” view of him. Even though Baraka believes he does not know Africa, he does feel as if he is somewhat tied to whiteness. He wonders who are “you, to concern / the white flat stomachs / of maidens, inside houses” (Baraka 23-25). He writes:

*Peeled moon  
light on my fingers  
move under  
her clothes. Where  
is her husband.  
(Baraka 26-30)*

The imagery used associates white people with purity and a loss of such. He writes “of maidens,” referring to virginal women, although he shows that is not actually the case here, for he is “peeling” them, or undressing them. “Moon” and “light,” separated by a line break, have multiple meanings. The woman referenced is “Peeled moonlight” or “Peeled moon,” which is “light” on his fingers. “Light” also has two meanings: she is light, as in not weighing much, or she is light, as in illuminating. By writing of his interactions with this white woman, Baraka shows he is in bed with whiteness—in bed with a white country and system—causing it to lose its cultural “purity.” He is having an affair with whiteness and ancestral Africa does not approve.

It is this very whiteness, thus, that Baraka thinks causes “Africa” to push him even further away. It is rejecting Baraka now because of his association with white America, and his bedding of the “white maiden.” He writes:



*Black  
words  
throw up sand  
to eyes, fingers of  
their private dead.  
(Baraka 30-34)*

This is the third reference to “sand” Baraka makes, and the second time it has been “thrown up.” This repetition brings home the imagery of sand being in Baraka’s eyes, leaving him unable to see Africa because he does not know it. However, here “Black / words” throw up the sand, but he does not understand the words, “Whose soul, eyes, in sand.” Baraka has forgotten those words; he cannot see through the sand or understand it, for as he writes, “My color / is not theirs. Lighter, white man / talk. They shy away” (Baraka 35-37). In his association with whiteness, forced or not, Baraka feels that his ancestral connection with those dead and gone—those who came on boats over the ocean in chains—is dead. “People” then begins a new line, an example of enjambment, and the only other word on that line is the first word of the next sentence: “Africa.” By doing this, Baraka shows that “Africa” is his “so called/people.”

Baraka finally sums up why he is not connected to this Africa—these people. In Baraka’s eyes, “They shy away,” because of his interaction with whiteness. It has caused those of Africa to reject him, and now “Africa/is a foreign place” (Baraka 39-40). It is understood, therefore, that the “eyes/are something locked in/hate” (Baraka 13-15). The bitterness Baraka exhibits in the first stanza at this hatred raises its head again, despite his claim in the second stanza that he does not need to think about “Africa,” for “who are they. People. To concern/myself” (Baraka 21). This resentment is exposed especially when Baraka writes, “My own/dead souls, my so called/people” (Baraka 37-39). He does unknowingly claim Africa here by using “My own,” but that is contrasted to the sarcastic bitterness of saying “my, so called/people.” Baraka seems angry and hurt by Africa, for if they are his so-called people, then why won’t they accept him? Even though he operates within a white world, he did not choose to be born there. Yet “Africa” still pulls away from him.

Baraka ends with one last exposure of the pain he feels at his cultural distance from Africa, which he believes is due to their rejection. In the last stanza he writes, “You are/as any other sad man here/american” (Baraka 40-42). By saying to his audience—that they are a “sad man”—Baraka again

shows the hurt he has at being rejected from “Africa,” his ancestral culture. He and all African-Americans are a “sad man” because they are “american.” American is not even capitalized as Africa is, for their status as “american” is lower than white Americans; they are not fully of this land. Baraka is lost. He is unable to hear the voices of his ancestors in the wind. Even though he claims otherwise, he is bitter over the “american” he has become due to forced cultural distance. Baraka is like a lost son; he is hurt that his family has not taken him back, but is trying himself to convince himself that he was never truly a part of that family anyway. But he fails, and that is why he is “as any other sad man here.”

While in “Notes for a Speech,” Amiri Baraka claims to have no connection to “Africa,” all the while bitter at what he believes is their rejection of him, in “To the Diaspora,” Gwendolyn Brooks argues that all of those of the diaspora, including African-Americans like Baraka, are “Africa” too. In “To the Diaspora,” Brooks captures the “call” of the call-and-response form. Call and response is a form that is prevalent in African songs and African-American poetry and spirituals. In this rhythmic form of language, a narrator will call out to the audience they are speaking to, and the audience will respond, this cycle repeating. Brooks begins the poem with the line, “you did not know you were Afrika” (Brooks). The line is in italics, separated by itself from any stanza, and not included in the line count. This helps to indicate that the line is like the chorus of call-and-response, as is shown in its later repetition in the first stanza. The narrative perspective of “the call” is shown here as well. Brooks uses “you,” and one knows her audience from the title “To the Diaspora.” The diaspora is whom she is writing to; the diaspora is the “you.” Brooks also spells Africa as “Afrika,” which is the Kiswahili spelling. This ties her poem from the beginning to Africa, even linguistically.

First Brooks sets up her audience, the diaspora, as lost from their cultural identity and describes the knowledge necessary for them to find their connection and peace with their cultural and ancestral roots of Africa. As found in the first stanza, they have “set out for Afrika,” but she says to them, “you did not know where you were going” (Brooks 1-2). Brooks turns on the word “Because,” making it its own line—the only word to do so in the poem (Brooks 3). This adds emphasis to the rest of the stanza, which contains a message that reverberates all throughout the poem: those of the diaspora are Africa, too. After “Because,” she explains why those of the diaspora are lost and what they need to know to find the way. Brooks writes:

*Because  
you did not know you were Afrika.  
You did not know the Black continent  
that had to be reached  
was you.  
(Brooks 3-7)*

The lost ones of the diaspora, like Baraka, are struggling to find a connection to Africa because they are looking in the wrong place. Brooks says people must look within themselves for a connection to Africa, but those like Baraka seek such cultural peace in the acceptance of others. To truly find Africa, one does not go out searching for it; they must find cultural peace through internal recognition of their identity as African, for they are “the Black continent.” The phrase, “You do not know,” ends up repeated three times in this stanza, adding strength to Brooks’ claim that those of the diaspora are lacking the knowledge to connect them to Africa—that they are “the Black continent.” Those of the diaspora are searching, but unable to find that relationship to their ancestral culture, because they are looking for external acceptance. They have not realized that they will only find cultural peace if they stop internally rejecting Africa over a perceived external repudiation, and instead understand themselves as Africa, too.

Brooks goes on to describe how the diaspora does not yet believe her when she tells them of the connection that is coming to them. She writes:

*I could not have told you then, that some sun  
would come  
somewhere over the road, would come evoking the diamonds  
of you, the Black continent—  
somewhere over the road.  
(Brooks 8-13)*

“Sun,” “road,” and “diamonds” all contribute to sensory and visual imagery that relates back to Africa. Africa is known for its diamonds, heat, and sun. When Brooks says, “the road,” it has a metaphorical, existential meaning: the path of connection to Africa through internal acceptance. The sun—Africa—is reaching over the road, coming to “evoke diamonds” of the “you,” who is the diaspora. Africa is coming to pull greatness out of the diaspora, but they do not yet believe Brooks that they are a part of Africa, too, because they are looking for cultural peace through external recognition.

There is also a lot of repetition in this stanza, as with the phrases, “would come,” “somewhere over the road,” and “the Black continent.” The repetition throughout the poem, along with the imagery reminiscent of Africa, all adds to the sense that Brooks’ poem is the “call” of call and response. She is calling to the diaspora, to those like Baraka, waiting for their response, and for them to know. For right now, she says, “You would not have believed by mouth” (Brooks 14). Brooks is calling to those of the diaspora who cannot find their connection to their culture and identity, even though she knows that will not believe her when she says that they are “the Black continent.”

Brooks continues this description of the diaspora’s disbelief as she explains how they can find a connection to Africa and peace within their cultural identity. Brooks, as she writes in the third stanza, goes somewhere close to, “the heat and youth of the road”—close to a cultural connection to Africa to meet “you,” the diaspora (Brooks 16). While the diaspora is searching for the “road,” they still need that final piece of knowledge that they are Africa, too; the only ones blocking them from cultural peace is themselves. The road has “heat,” likening back to the sun reference in the previous stanza and the word “youth.” The “youth” of the road comes from its newness. Brooks is saying that not many yet know how to get to the road and get connected to Africa. Brooks’ audience “very little believed” her, although they were, as she writes, “liking my loyalty, liking belief” (Brooks 17-18). Even though the diaspora is trying, they do not yet believe that a connection to their ancestral and cultural roots is coming, that peace is coming, if only they find acceptance within themselves.

Lastly, Brooks calls on the diaspora to spread the message to others who also belong to Africa. She says in the last stanza, “Here is some sun. Some. / Now off into the places rough to reach” (Brooks 19-20). She has given them some connection, through the knowledge that cultural peace is found through internal acceptance, and is calling to them to go out and give the sun to the others of the diaspora, to people like Baraka who are lost in their journey. The very last line ends with more repetition that stresses the importance of this knowledge, this sun, saying, “Your work, that was done, to be done to be done” (Brooks 23). The repetition here emphasizes the need of the sun to be spread over and over and over again. What was Brooks’ work is now also “your work,” the work of those whom she has helped gain the connection to Africa and find a cultural peace within themselves. The work “that was done” for them must be done for the whole diaspora; they must all find their way to the road.

Amiri Baraka’s poem “Notes for a Speech” shows his pain and bitterness

at the cultural abandonment he feels at the forced cultural distance African-Americans have from Africa and a perceived rejection by Africa, but Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "To the Diaspora" is made for those like Baraka who cannot find their connection to Africa, and are tormented because of this. Brooks' use of the call-and-response form, supported by language reminiscent of Africa, narrative audience, and repetition, shows the sun as a cultural connection to Africa she has found within herself, and Baraka's cultural abandonment is conveyed through his use of enjambment and narrative audience. Those of the diaspora, whose ancestors were ripped from their homes and shipped all over the world like animals, often struggle to find their place within the world: African? American? Both? For those like Baraka, it can cause a bitterness to develop.

Baraka's resentment of Africa and cultural anguish is the opposite of the cultural peace Brooks has found within her cultural identity. Baraka is filled with hostility about what he feels is a cultural abandonment by Africa, for he believes he has been rejected and cannot call Africa his own now. For Baraka, "Africa is a foreign place," but Brooks says, "you were Afrika" (Baraka 39-40 and Brooks 3). Baraka, according to Brooks, has gone about looking for a connection to Africa the wrong way; one should not look outwards to others, but inwards to themselves for that connection and cultural understanding. Baraka says, "African blues/ does not know me," but Brooks retorts, "you did not know you were Afrika" (Baraka 1 and Brooks 1). Both poems begin as opposites, but Brooks want Baraka and other people of the African diaspora to accept themselves as a true, valid part of Africa.

Brooks believes that "the Black continent" is somewhere over the road, and that it is not "sad men" who are "american," as Baraka writes, but a valid extension of Africa that has "come/somewhere over the road" (Baraka 41-42 and Brooks 9-10). Instead of coming to terms with his identity and finding peace as a part of "the Black continent," Baraka has shied away in pain (Brooks 6). However, his anger is misdirected. Instead of being mad at colonialism and those who took him "over the road," as Brooks says, he believes that those from Africa have rejected him because of their differences (Brooks 1). But differences in experience do not always equate to complete separation of identity, as Brooks says. Being African-American does not make Baraka an "ugly man," like he calls himself, and it certainly does not make him too far gone from Africa for him to forsake his cultural identity within it (Baraka 22). Brooks' poem is calling to those like Baraka to accept themselves and their uniqueness as a part of Africa, receiving "some sun" to heal themselves from their agony of cultural distance. It may be "rough to reach" people of

the diaspora, like Baraka, who feel distant from their cultural identity, as some can be “unwillingly a-wobble” (Brooks 22) when learning they are a part of Africa too. But the only person truly able to reject them from “Afrika” is themselves. If a person is a part of something like Africa, as Brooks says, the only one that can bar them from claiming it is themselves; Baraka is his only gatekeeper.

In “To the Diaspora,” Gwendolyn Brooks attempts to help people of the African diaspora like Amiri Baraka in “Notes for a Speech,” who is tormented by the anguish of forced cultural distance from Africa, obtain a cultural peace within their own identity. Being violently stripped from their roots and their heritage as a result of slavery and colonialism resulted in a new group of African-Americans with different cultural experiences than their ancestors in Africa, just like Baraka points out. But that does not mean they are completely separated from “Africa” as a cultural identity, just as Brooks says. People must listen to those like Brooks and let the sun come, for the diaspora is still Africa, but that Africa is within themselves.

#### WORKS CITED

- Baraka, Amiri. “Notes for a Speech.” *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995)*, edited by Paul Vangelisti, Marsilio Publishers, pp. 48–49.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn. “To the Diaspora.” *Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*, edited by Cary Nelson, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Oxford University Press, p. 143.

---

# Held Together with Rum: Alcohol as a Stabilizing Agent in Pirate Communities

Jack Brower '19

Prior to Blackbeard's ascension as one of the most notorious pirates ever, he nearly lost everything in a disaster at sea. Blackbeard did not have a run-in with the English Navy or the Spanish Armada, nor did a severe storm almost wipe out his fleet, as one might guess. Rather, a mutiny almost tore his crew apart before the pirate could wreak havoc along the Atlantic coast and send British officials into a panic over transcontinental trading. Blackbeard recounted the surprising cause of this near-catastrophic insurrection in his journal: "Such a Day, Rum all out; – Our Company Somewhat Sober: – A damn'd Confusion Amongst us! – Rogues a plotting; – great Talk of Separation. – So I look'd sharp for a Prize; – Such a Day took one, with a great deal of Liquor on Board, So kept the Company hot, damn'd hot, then all Things went well again."<sup>1</sup> In order to quell the mayhem threatening to undermine his captaincy, Blackbeard gave his fellow rouges liquor, the substance that kept many pirate communities functioning throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

Despite the positive sentiment pirate crews maintained towards alcohol, popular culture often scorned drinking and considered drunkenness an intolerable sin. Seventeenth and eighteenth century authors such as A.O. Exquemelin and Daniel Defoe employed shameful rhetoric when referring to this binge drinking culture.<sup>2</sup> For example, Exquemelin refers to the tavern culture in Jamaica by denouncing Captain Morgan, who had "found many of his chief officers and soldiers reduced to their former state of indigence through their immoderate vices and debauchery."<sup>3</sup> Daniel Defoe similarly prefaces the aforementioned quote from Blackbeard's journal by reprimanding "[the men] encouraged and spirited one another up in their Wickedness, to which a continual Course of drinking did not a little contribute."<sup>4</sup> Exquemelin and Defoe wrote primarily for a literate upper and middle class audience in Europe, and accordingly adhered to negative bourgeoisie attitudes concerning alcohol use. Alcohol did not, however, always destroy communities and lead to poverty and death, as many well-off members of society argued. In fact, rum and other types of hard alcohol

---

1 Daniel Defoe, *A General History of the Pyrates*, (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999), 89.

2 Historians still debate whether Daniel Defoe or Captain Johnson authored *A General History of the Pyrates*. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to the Daniel Defoe as the author.

3 A.O. Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000), 173.

4 Defoe, *A General History of the Pyrates*, 89.



fostered productive relationships among multinational merchant and pirate crews that may have otherwise struggled to communicate.

Alcohol provided many benefits on pirate ships. Drinking helped create culture and traditions on ships that lacked a clear nationality. Liquor also dulled the pain associated with the brutal nature of life at sea and the harsh physical punishments enacted on crewmembers by captains. The substance helped to create counter-cultural, egalitarian spaces aboard pirate ships that rejected popular teachings concerning politeness and religious morality. Indeed, these binge drinking environments created brotherhoods among pirates that facilitated resolution when disputes did arise. Finally, tavern life supported the budding economies of landed communities in the Caribbean. Alehouses, in turn, provided news to common seamen and pirates about the whereabouts of the British Navy and other important matters. By examining the nuances of each of these facets of life at sea, we come to understand the vital role liquor played in creating and sustaining the maritime communities that turned the wheels of the British Empire at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Marcus Rediker argues that emerging market capitalism generated inhumane working conditions for seamen. To free seamen of their perceived role as mere objects in a larger industrial system, Rediker attempts to construct “a history from the bottom up” of life at sea.<sup>5</sup> While he does explain both why sailors frequently abandoned merchant contracts, and how they resisted the commodification of their labor by forming close-knit social communities aboard pirate ships and merchant vessels, his work largely ignores the role alcohol played in this resistance. He treats liquor as an insignificant background to primary source documents. Challenging Rediker, Mark Hanna expands the definition of pirate to anyone who robbed at sea, eliminating historical biases that favor pirates, like Sir Francis Drake, who may have received more popular support due to nationality. Changing international conditions, such as whether nations were at war, and personal circumstances, seeing that most pirates were not pirates for life, further complicate what constitutes a pirate for Hanna. He uses this expanded definition to situate piracy in an imperial context that explains

---

5     Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7. Rediker borrows this research framework from Eugene D. Genovese’s 1971 chapter, “American Slaves and Their History.”

piracy's relationship to "the rise of British Empire." In the late 1500s, the British Crown could not fund a royal navy capable of disrupting the Spanish Empire. Pirates labeled as adventurers did England's dirty work. By the start of the eighteenth century, however, the British State viewed pirates like Blackbeard as more of a nuisance than as a military ally. As the Empire grew into the leading world hegemonic power, the definition of who constituted a pirate also expanded.<sup>6</sup> Although Rediker and Hanna explained what life looked like at the individual level and how pirates operated in the greater Atlantic, both fail to give special attention to alcohol when considering the social lives of pirates, due to alcohol's banality. Virginal DeJohn Anderson provides a methodology to examine alcohol's importance in pirates' lives. In her work on early American colonial society, Anderson emphasizes the role of ubiquitous farm animals in Anglo-America to produce a more ecologically comprehensive view of early American society. Like farm animals, alcohol appears in early modern records regarding piracy with great frequency.<sup>7</sup> Applying Anderson's methodology to these records by paying special attention to alcohol, a substance so common it often goes unnoticed, enables one to investigate pirate societies from a new vantage point. This perspective helps explain how pirates functioned and survived in the counter-cultural wooden communities they created.

In the increasingly globalized economy of the early seventeenth century, merchant and pirate crews almost always had sailors from various parts of world the aboard their ships. Most sailors on Anglo-American vessels came from different parts of Europe, such as the British Isles, the American colonies, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain, and Scandinavia. These crews also attracted Africans, Asians, and Native Americans.<sup>8</sup> Pirate ships, even more than British merchant vessels, were incredibly diverse, as they could not afford to be as particular about the men they recruited. Once a group of pirates plundered a merchant ship, they would often give captured sailors the option to swear an oath and join them under the black flag. Some captains would even agree to stage kidnappings, so sailors could transition back

---

6 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, f. 256.

7 Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*, (New York: Oxford Univerity Press, 2004), 3; Jack Brower, "Environmental Violence: The 1641 Irish Rebellion," 2017.

8 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 156.

into mainstream society without major legal repercussions.<sup>9</sup> Sailors who swore oaths of piracy brought their diverse linguistic and cultural practices aboard, giving pirate crews an incredibly multinational makeup. When Captain Morgan found himself outnumbered and trapped by the Spanish in Maracaibo, he brought his men together and read them the Spanish Admiral Don Alonso's demands, "both in French and English."<sup>10</sup> Presumably, Don Alonso wrote the letter to Captain Morgan in his native language, Spanish. Captain Morgan needed a strong command of three languages to maneuver his way out of a potentially deadly spot, attesting to the diversity of both pirate crews and life at sea in general.

This multinational composition prevented merchant and pirate ships from simply adopting the cultural practices of a single nation. Sailors had to find ways to look past the allegiances they may have felt towards their home countries in order to communicate and work efficiently on the open ocean, an environment where one mistake could result in death. One thing that these disparate sailors could bond over was alcohol. It helped seamen broach multicultural differences and create social bonds, translating to better working conditions. Marcus Rediker recounts an "instance when several sea robbers 'fell to drinking very hard' and 'prophanely singing at Suppertime Spanish and French Songs out of a Dutch Prayer Book.'"<sup>11</sup> Although Rediker uses this occasion to highlight the diversity of pirate crews, the hard drinking that preceded this cross-cultural exchange likely enabled it. The oaths that pirates took when they swore loyalty to one another and "pledged to be 'true to the crew'" were also "accompanied by ritual, drink, and cheer."<sup>12</sup> These oaths and the consumption of alcohol that almost always accompanied them helped keep pirate crews together in times of internal dispute.

The bonds alcohol created led to alternative forms of social organization. Historian Kevin McDonald describes a rather unique resolution decided upon by a group of pirates after a good deal of binge drinking: "fourteen

---

9 For an example see Daniel Defoe, *An account of the conduct and proceedings of the late John Gow alias Smith, captain of the late pirates: executed for murther and piracy committed on board the George Gally, afterwards call'd the Revenge*, (Los Angeles, HardPress Publishing, 2013), 22.

10 Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 160.

11 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 156. Quoted in "Proceedings of the Court Held on the Coast of Africa upon Trying of 100 Pirates Taken by his Ma[jes]ties ship *Swallow*."

12 *Ibid.*, 166. Quoted in *Examination of Richard Capper*, HCA 1/54 (1718), f. 70.

pirate-settlers, unhappy with their share of £1,200 each, divided themselves into two groups of seven to fight to the death on the beach, winner take all. The two survivors...split the booty as the blood of their felled comrades pooled around them.”<sup>13</sup> Although incredibly violent and costly for their community, the pirate-settlers who engaged in this fight decided to do so voluntarily and came to a resolution on their own terms. The custom of fighting to the death enabled pirates to solve their disagreements without the aid of a judiciary system, which often made unjust decisions in the 1600s and 1700s. By keeping the dispute away from authorities, pirates remained independent and on the periphery of society. This settlement was only possible through the community formed at sea. Drinking also helped multinational crews create their own cultural spaces. Sailors aboard merchant vessels developed unique maritime traditions, such as the “sailor’s baptism.” When novice mariners crossed the equator for the first time, veterans presented them with two options: undergo the “baptism,” or pay a fine in the form of alcohol and other provisions. Not wanting to part ways with “a Bowl of Punch,” most sailors preferred to be tied to a rope and plunged deep into the sea three consecutive times. Following the ritual, a now slightly larger brotherhood of sailors would celebrate by “singing, dancing, telling tales, and drinking.”<sup>14</sup> The threat of having to part ways with one’s treasured ration of “Punch” spurred the creation of a fraternal culture among common seamen. In another version of the “sailor’s baptism,” every member aboard the ship who forewent the right of passage had to pay a fine in the following amounts: “If he be an officer in the ship, two shillings; and, if a passenger, according to his pleasure.” Regular seamen needed to pay “twelve pence for their ransom.” A.O. Exquemelin explains: “All the profit which accrues by this ceremony is kept by the master’s mate, who, after reaching their port, doth usually lay it out in wine, which is drunk amongst the ancient seamen.”<sup>15</sup> Exquemelin does not elaborate on which members of the crew qualify as “ancient seamen.” According to Rediker’s logic, however, one could presume that any baptized—and by extension, no longer novice—sailor would fit the

---

13 Kevin P. McDonald, “Pirate-Settlers of Madagascar,” in *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonial America and the Indo-Atlantic World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 88.

14 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, f. 188-9. Quoted in Captain Pennycook’s Journal.

15 Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 11.

category and have a legitimate claim to the wine. In other words, a sailor's baptism presupposed his ability to partake in the alcohol filled festivities that succeeded the custom.

The alternative methods of social organizing on ships did more than just cement bonds among crewmembers; they facilitated interactions between pirates and native people. In Madagascar, the king of a group of Malagasy people made a group of pirates "Swear by the sea, that they would be Friends to them, and not molest them." McDonald points out that a symbolic toast sealed this oath of friendship, as the Malagasy king "compelled" the captain and officers of the pirates "to drink a strange concoction of saltwater and gunpowder."<sup>16</sup> Although the cocktail did not contain any alcohol, the toast blended elements of Indonesian and Atlantic culture, as the pirates were well accustomed to drinking to commemorate an agreement. Had Europeans from a cultural background less accustomed to alcohol, binge drinking, and informal oaths interacted with the Malagasy people, they might have rejected the toast of friendship and failed to establish a settlement in Madagascar. The pirates' exposure to alcohol eased their transition into a new society and enabled them to play the part of "early modern transcultural frontiersmen."<sup>17</sup> Seen in this ambassadorial light, a corollary consequence of the pirates and privateers operating in Madagascar in the late 1600s and early 1700s was the spread of the English Empire, as the Betsimisaraka of Madagascar believed pirates represented the average Englishman.

While the "sailor's baptism" and other bonding engendered fraternity among crewmembers and those they encountered amicably, the ritual often made captains nervous by momentarily challenging the hierarchy of the ship. Some captains went so far as to label the custom "heathen," and discouraged seamen from taking part in it at all.<sup>18</sup> If the captain could not stop the tradition, he certainly attempted to stay away from the festivities that ensued "in the interest of maintaining distance and authority" from the crew.<sup>19</sup> If drinking and celebration represented a way to break down barriers and create social bonds, captains did all they could to avoid partaking in these activities. Many captains sought to eradicate drinking altogether by punishing drunken sailors in the same manner they would mutinous ones.

---

16 McDonald, "Pirate-Settlers of Madagascar," 96.

17 Ibid., 97.

18 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 187-188.

19 Ibid., 187.

The unfortunate William Squier endured the typical discipline for such an offense when he “was tied to the shrouds and forced to hang with all of his weight on his arms for five or six hours.”<sup>20</sup> Some captains would even “pinch provisions,” or withhold alcohol and food, from seamen in order to trade these goods at port and maximize their profits from a voyage.<sup>21</sup> While drinking provided for better working conditions on ships, captains were weary of its effects due to their fears that drink would effect such a strong bond that the crew could overwhelm their captain’s power.

Captains ensured these fraternal bonds did not usurp their power by making conditions aboard a seventeenth and eighteenth century merchant ship miserable for the common seaman. Rediker illustrates the high-risk, low-reward nature of life in the British Navy: “Seamen entered the navy like men ‘dragged to execution’...almost half of all of those pressed (forced into Naval service) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries died at sea. Those lucky enough to stay alive often went unpaid.”<sup>22</sup> Free wage labor and capitalism created a hierarchy in the maritime world that pitted profits against human life. This commodification of human beings encouraged captains to establish their authority through unusually cruel punishments.<sup>23</sup> Discipline occasionally crossed the line and turned into outright murder. In 1732, rumors of mutiny spread throughout captain Samuel Naylor’s decks. In response, Naylor demanded guns from the armory to protect himself, but Potter, the ship’s gunner, “locked the arm chest.” Outraged, the captain “Struck [Potter] with his...larg walking Cane upon his head which broak his head in such a manner that the blood gushed out in a great Quantity.” When Potter’s crewmates attempted to intervene, Naylor threatened, “If any Man gives him a drink of Water he had better jump over board...[Potter’s] last words were ‘for God’s Sake don’t concel my Murther for [Captain Naylor] has murdered me.”<sup>24</sup> To endure these harsh conditions, sailors turned to alcohol whenever they got the chance. Perhaps the cook Barnaby Slush best sums up the substance’s ability to give seamen the will to push onward in the

---

20 Ibid., Quoted in Pringle v. Prett, HCA 24/136 (1730).

21 Ibid., 151.

22 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 33.

23 Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 218.

24 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 224. Quoted in Information of James Tindall, George Taylor, Christopher Briggs, Mathew Hale, William Dixon, and Elizabeth Beal, HCA 1/56 (1732), ff. 63-9.

face of such great adversity when he proclaimed, "Liquor is the very cement that keeps the mariner's body and soul together."<sup>25</sup> Without the anesthetic qualities of alcohol, seamen may not have been able to persevere through the trying times they faced daily.

If they did not die young, older mariners who failed to escape the difficult work aboard naval and merchant ships could be found "unhappily drowning [themselves] in liquor." Hoping to avoid this fate, many sailors decided to risk their lives, swear oaths of loyalty, and join the pirates that wreaked havoc in Caribbean waters throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of the most notorious pirates in world history came to the Caribbean as indentured servants or as common seamen aboard slave and merchant vessels. Men such as Blackbeard, Henry Morgan, Bartholomew Roberts ("Black Bart"), and the heart eater Francis L'Ollonais understood from firsthand experience the inhumane and unbearable working conditions that a hierarchical wage labor system created. Rather than live their lives in perpetual fear of abuse from tyrannical captains, these men opted for what Black Bart deemed "A Merry Life and [a] Short One" as pirates. While successful pirates such as those listed above may have had wealth and fame in mind, pirates with lower aspirations like Joseph Mansfield decided, "The love of Drink and a Lazy Life [were] Stronger Motives with him than Gold." Whether one joined to enjoy alcohol or to achieve personal entrepreneurial goals, the ideals of freedom and equality that governed pirate societies made these pursuits a possibility for the common mariner.

With these principles in mind, pirate communities created a more equal wage system and established rules to ensure a democratic process, a process only possible because of the bonds formed over drink. The motto, "No prey, no pay," governed their system. Pirates only received money when they successfully plundered ships at sea or forts on land. Embezzling any of the loot or withholding it from the community chest represented one of the greatest crimes a pirate could commit, as the men agreed to equally divide their treasure.<sup>26</sup> More than just dividing the loot into equal shares, pirates also looked out for one another by creating a detailed early modern insurance policy of sorts. Exquemelin explains one such policy: "For the loss of a right arm 600 pieces-of-eight, or 6 slaves; for the loss of a left arm 500 pieces-of-

---

25 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 191. Quoted in Robinson, *British Tar*, 101 and Barlow's *Journal*, 142.

26 Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 61.

eight, or 5 slaves...for an eye 100 pieces-of-eight, or one slave..." and so on all the way down to the loss of a finger.<sup>27</sup> In the case of death, pirates would seek out the "lawful heirs" of their deceased brethren to honor their service under the black flag. Contracts and lawyers, of course, did not guarantee these agreements. Rather, informal oaths strengthened by alcohol and celebration created a brotherhood of pirates who looked out for one another.

In addition to more equal working conditions, captain and crew aboard pirate ships also created egalitarian societies and broke down the hierarchies that defined naval and merchant crew relations by drinking together on a regular basis. These men used alcohol as a symbol of their rejection of British cultural norms in the eighteenth century. Just before his execution in 1720, one pirate "called for a bottle of wine, and taking a Glass of it, he Drank Damnation to the Governour and Confusion to the Colony [of Virginia]."<sup>28</sup> Another pirate crew "drowned its punch, proclaiming, 'Curse the King and all the Higher Powers.'"<sup>29</sup> These floating democratic societies rejected traditional cultural authority directly with seditious words, but also indirectly by engaging in binge drinking, an activity that the Church of England denounced as a "bestly sin" that created "stupidyed Atheists." The drinking and cursing that abounded on the decks of pirate and merchant ships concerned John Flavel, a puritan preacher out of Boston, so much that in 1725 he penned a religious pamphlet titled, *A Pathetical and Serious Disswasive From the Horrid and Detestable Sins of Drunkenness, Swearing, Uncleaness, Forgetfulness of Mercies, Violation of Promises, and Atheistical Concept of Death*.<sup>30</sup> It seems Flavel's efforts had little effect, however, as the crew of the *Tartar*, a merchant ship bound for New York in 1725, beat Reverend Orgilvie with his own Bible after he tried to distribute additional copies. In addition to vehemently rejecting the religious beliefs the Bible symbolized, the crew also tormented Orgilvie simply because "he wou'd not swear and drink as fast as they, and seemingly show'd his dislike of those vices."<sup>31</sup> Religious teachings scorned drinking and, by extension, maritime culture, forcing

---

27 Ibid., 60.

28 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 274.

29 Ibid., 275. Quoted in Deposition of Edward North, CO 37/10 (1718).

30 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 191 and ff. 167. Quoted in Flavel, *Pathetical and Serious Disswasive*, 140, 151 and *Matiner's Divine Mate*, 48-50.

31 Ibid., 176. Quoted in Richard Hewitt to the Bishop of London, Warwick County, July 19, 1725, Fulham Palace Papers 14, Lambeth Palace, London, No. 65.



pirates and other mariners to the edge of society if they wished to engage in these behaviors.

Agreeing with these religious teachings, members of the middle and upper classes in England looked down on binge drinking. In his book, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*, historian Paul Langford argues that the emergence of “politeness,” or the general sentiment that dictated how the upper classes in England should behave, emerged as “the logical consequence of commerce.”<sup>32</sup> As capitalism and the free wage labor system took hold in England, an increasing number of citizens attempted to escape from the depths of poverty and reach the next rung up on the social ladder. In order to do so, these aspiring members of the middle and upper classes had to conduct themselves according to the principles of politeness. In this new British order, many blamed drunkenness for poverty, premature death, and crime.<sup>33</sup> The London Society for the Reformation of Manners, founded in 1691, took the ideals laid out in Favel’s pamphlet to the extreme by prosecuting “offenses such as drunkenness, prostitution, gaming, and profanation of the Sabbath.”<sup>34</sup> Daniel Defoe, an author that many historians believe penned *A General History of the Pyrates* (a source cited at length throughout this paper), was a member of this society. Defoe’s participation in the group may help to explain his negative rhetoric surrounding alcohol and piracy. Paul Langford further explains that not only did members of elite society abhor drunkenness, they also argued that “merely spending time in the alehouse” prevented the impoverished masses from escaping their difficult living conditions.<sup>35</sup> Seeing that Pirates and sailors alike spent a considerable amount of time binge drinking in the alehouses of Port Royal, Jamaica, they clearly had no place in the “polite” social environment that characterized England’s wealthier neighborhoods in the eighteenth century.

Considering that “respected” members of society did not engage in binge drinking, taverns offered a sanctuary to the common seaman. In these spaces, the common mariner could drink to his heart’s content while tapping into an informal news network. Void of the strict social hierarchy

---

32 Paul Langford, *The New Oxford History of England, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

33 Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 126.

34 *Ibid.*, 128.

35 *Ibid.*, 150. Information from John Clayton’s 1755 published advice to the poor of Manchester.

that dominated relations at sea, rumors about which captains posed major threats to the safety of their crewmen and which could be trusted spread like wildfire. At these taverns, pirates gained valuable information and recruited men who had deserted their merchant ships in search of more equitable work environments. Marcus Rediker goes as far as to claim, “The very success of pirates between 1716 and 1726 depended upon their access to the information that flowed through [the tavern’s] informal network.”<sup>36</sup> Without the allure of rum, beer, and wine, these informal networks could not have existed, as seamen would not have gathered in large numbers on a regular basis for anything less.

Taverns and alehouses encouraged pirates to return to plundering other ships by tempting men to spend their earnings very quickly. Port Royal had an economy centered on illicit trade with the Spanish Empire. This black market rewarded careless record keeping and helped create an island dominated by “ready money” rather than commodities.<sup>37</sup> The slave trade that ran directly through the port city was a cash business as well, making the town a perfect place for pirates to either sell their loot for coins or use the “pieces-of-eight” they looted to buy exorbitant amounts of liquor and beer.<sup>38</sup> Exquemelin explains what a typical stay at Port Royal looked like for a crew of pirates: “[The pirates] made shift to lose and spend the riches they had got in much less time than they were purchased by robbing. The taverns and stews, according to the custom of Pirates, got the greatest part thereof, insomuch that soon after they were constrained to seek more by the same unlawful means they had obtained the preceding.”<sup>39</sup> The alcohol sold at taverns depleted pirates of their treasure in a matter of weeks or months, forcing them back out to sea if they hoped to continue their lifestyle of binge drinking in the future. One should remember Mark Hanna’s argument that many pirates did wish to return to landed society and retire. Following this conceptualization of piracy as “one event or phase in man’s career,” rather than “a lifelong calling,” pirates spent large sums “in drinking and Extravagant Living” voluntarily.<sup>40</sup>

---

36 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 134.

37 Nuala Zahedieh, “The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655-1692,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1986): 583.

38 *Ibid.*, 591.

39 Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*, 100.

40 Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of British Empire*, 10; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the*

Drinking helped to create social bonds between multinational crews at sea who did not have much in common. Alcohol underlined the traditions and customs these men used to create brotherhoods and settle internal disputes. The Oaths strengthened by liquor established a set of egalitarian rules that ran counter to tyrannical environments that the commodification of human labor encouraged. By abolishing the wage hierarchy and splitting plunder evenly, pirates halted the flow of oppression that ran through capitalism. Liquor facilitated the creation of democratic communities by breaking down social barriers, drawing pirates and sailors together at taverns, and beckoning these men back to sea after they had spent their wages or plunder on the substance. In many ways, alcohol was the blood that flowed through the veins of pirate societies and kept them alive in the face of stigmatization and oppression at the hands of an increasingly organized and powerful British State.

---

*Deep Blue Sea*, 147. Quoted in Information of Ephraim Tiffany, HCA 1/57 (1740), f. 39. It is very possible that many seamen were addicted to alcohol, in which case the decision to spend large quantities of money quickly would not have been a voluntary one.

## WORKS CITED

### Primary Sources:

- Defoe, Daniel, and Manuel Schonhorn. *A General History of the Pyrates*. Dover, 1999.
- Defoe, Daniel. *An account of the conduct and proceedings of the late John Gow alias Smith, captain of the late pirates: executed for murther and piracy committed on board the George Gally, afterwards call'd the Revenge*. HardPress Publishing, 2013.
- Exquemelin, A. O. *The Buccaneers of America*. Dover Publications, 2000.

### Monographs:

- Anderson, Virginia DeJohn. *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Hanna, Mark G. *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Langford, Paul. *The New Oxford History of England, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Rediker, Marcus. *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Slave Ship: a Human History*. Penguin Press, 2008.

### Articles and Chapters:

- McDonald, Kevin P. "Pirate-Settlers of Madagascar." *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonial America and the Indo-Atlantic World*. University of California Press, 2015, pp. 81–98.
- Zahedieh, Nuala. "The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655-1692." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4, Oct. 1986, pp. 570–593., doi:10.2307/1923683.



