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Audience Reception Analysis Toward Women's Representation in *Damsel*

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ABSTRACT

Upon its release, Damsel's movie became the spotlight since its director, Juan Carlos, claimed it represented contemporary feminism. Using the encoding-decoding model of communication by Stuart Hall, this study aims to analyze the representation of women's heroes and how the audiences respond to them. The data collection techniques include interviews, newspaper articles, and observations from the movie itself. From the decoded messages obtained, the findings show that the hegemonic dominant audience agreed that there was a concept of feminism explained through the heroine; however, the negotiated audience found it unrealistic due to the overpowering female characterization, and the oppositional audience found that the movie depicted women's suffering due to the patriarchal system rather than women's empowerment. Furthermore, the majority of audience responses indicate agreement where they acknowledge the feminist values in the film. Therefore, this movie stands out among many hero-centric films by highlighting a fresh portrayal of women in media, challenging the conventional depiction of women as weak and needing rescue by men for happiness or salvation. It also questions how well they align with real-world realities.

Keywords: *audience analysis; Damsel; female action hero; feminism; women representation*

INTRODUCTION

The film has long been a medium to represent the condition of gender inequality as well as a portrayal of women's ability to become heroes. One categorization in literature alongside novels, poetry, and play, films can raise a wide variety of themes and issues. A film can be a vibrant place to explore stereotypes about women that can often position women as central characters who represent the challenge of issues regarding weak women (Reyvonputra et al., 2023). From another perspective, the debate about feminism in popular movie culture has the potential to be recognized and criticized. In other words, the emerging phenomenon of popular culture can produce the kind of critical movement that helps efforts to establish feminism as a genre that has a direct social and cultural impact (Cattien, 2019).

Under modern patriarchal conditions, media, including film, has a significant role in shaping and influencing perceptions of traditional gender. Women in films have often been seen from the perspective of feminism interpreted by men, which then evolved into men's perceptions of women's views. The representation of women in films is important because films not only reflect social reality but can also influence society's views and values (Reyvonputra et al., 2023). However, women and their problems are often used in films only as a tool to make the story more exciting or dramatic, with a focus on developing male characters as heroes or dominant protagonists. Male actors are often central to the film's narrative, acting as heroes who protect women from various threats or dangers (Akçora As et al., 2019). As a classic example, most of the early Disney Princess films, such as *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), feature a prince or male character as an essential figure in the princesses' lives. In these narratives, princesses are often portrayed as passive, submissive figures who often

require rescue or help from a male hero to achieve their happiness or salvation (Karmakar et al., 2023). These movies reinforce traditional gender roles where women are expected to be objects awaiting rescue or protection from men, and where the focus of the story is often the search for true love and living happily ever after. Nonetheless, changes in the representation of women in films have also been seen over time with the emergence of more inclusive and progressive narratives. There is an attempt to showcase a shift to more diverse and inclusive representations of women in the media, which better reflect the complexity and diversity of women's experiences in real life.

Along with that, the development of films about gender inequality has been widely released. Women are no longer seen as objects but as fundamental subjects. For example, in several films by Disney, the portrayal of different princesses varies considerably. Most of the females in early Disney animation were portrayed as falling in love with a prince

or being inseparable from their family bonds, such as Snow White and Cinderella (Liu et al., 2021). In later developments, the diversity of Disney princesses contributes to the challenge of gender stereotypes. Disney princesses have evolved to become more than just characters focused on their physical appearance and romantic relationships (England et al., 2011; Singer, 2023). Some of them: Princess Jasmine is depicted as a headstrong and assertive princess who desires freedom and the ability to make her own choices. She actively challenges the idea of being a passive love interest and seeks to break free from the confines of palace life (Dodd, 2019). Furthermore, the character of Elsa from Frozen (2013) breaks away from the conventional princess narrative by focusing on self-discovery, empowerment, and personal growth. Her transformation from a fearful, isolated individual to a confident, independent queen resonates with audiences. It emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance and inner strength, which is centered

around accepting and embracing her unique powers rather than solely relying on a romantic relationship (Hine et al., 2018).

It is undeniable that for a long time, women have been portrayed as objects or commodities in films, with their bodies being used to sell products or convey themes. This objectification of women has contributed to a broader cultural attitude that sees women as mere objects rather than as individuals with their agency and humanity (Yang et al., 2020). Consequently, the idea of a strong female character has evolved into a new chapter due to the lack of women perceived as strong in mainstream media and a lack of awareness of the strong women who already existed on the margins (Knight, 2024). Along with the development of the movie industry, movies like *The Hunger Games* (2012), *Wonder Woman* (2017), and *Black Panther* (2018) have introduced diverse female characters and challenged traditional gender norms. Many films challenge this objectification of women and present them as complex and multidimensional individuals (Liu et al., 2021). These films often feature strong female protagonists who are not defined solely by their physical appearance or sexual attractiveness. Instead, they are portrayed as having their own agency, motivations, and desires.

Netflix has become a significant trend among young people due to its convenience and vast content library, catering to diverse tastes with a wide range of genres and themes, making it easy for viewers to find something that interests them. In February 2024, Netflix released a fairytale-themed movie. Not far from the original story, this movie portrays the character of a strong female princess who fights alone to save herself against a fire-spewing dragon. Upon this release, this movie became spotlight since it was claimed by the filmmaker as a new kind of princess movie and was raised as a form that breaks the stereotype of women heroes (Meredith, 2024). According to (Debruge, 2024), specialist movie critics from Variety, this film was classified as

one of the revisionist fairytale films whose main character, Elodie, is shown to be the hero's actions for a less gender-rigid period.

Juan Carlos, the director of the movie, has branded this film as a representation of contemporary feminism. As discussed in his interviews (Cinemablend, 2024), the film is not intended to be compared with others but to showcase what women need to do when facing the world. However, in reality, some film critics have pointed out that the storyline fails to capture the essence of feminism fully. Based on reviews from (Chowdury, 2024), it is known that the feminist point of view seems forced, probably due to the characterization of Elodie, who is depicted as being able to solve problems independently without any assistance, which makes the film seem "self-centered" in its approach to problem-solving. Moreover, according to a review from (Naahar, 2024), one of 'Rotten Tomatoes-approved' critics, mentioned that the film does not relate closely to feminism, as all women need to handle things on their own

by nature, so it is inherently expected that both men and women resolve issues based on individual capabilities.

For that reason, this article will explore various audience perceptions toward the film *Damsel*, which are related to modern feminism. Consequently, there is a possibility that not all audiences may view this movie as the filmmakers expected. As one of the top critics from the audience on The Rotten Tomatoes platform, Wilkinson (2024) from The New York Times, said in general, *Damsel* is proof that filmmakers still have not realized that a "strong female lead" is not enough to make a good movie. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the representation of the heroine in the Netflix film *Damsel* and how the audience perceives this representation using the Encoding-decoding communication model by Stuart Hall. Representation is translated as content delivered by the media to be interpreted into the message's meaning, especially in the context of gender representation and

feminism (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study examines audience responses to fairy tale movies with female heroes that air on Netflix. Data sources were drawn from interviews with several participants to get the audience's views regarding the understanding of the theme of feminism that the filmmakers have claimed. The interviews gathered audience opinions and perspectives on Elodie as the heroine. Additional data was drawn from movie reviews on the internet and responses on social media. Analysis was conducted based on Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory. This research uses qualitative methods to investigate the representation of gender, especially women, in films, with a systematic approach that focuses on understanding real-life phenomena in a natural context (Creswell, 2009).

DISCUSSION

The findings were sourced from online observations of several movie reviews, transcribing interviews with the director, and interviews. In this film, directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, the characterization of Elodie as a brave and independent woman is essential in creating a narrative that combats established gender stereotypes (Meredith, 2024). Through the story of Elodie struggling to achieve freedom and courage, the director not only creates an exciting adventure story but also invites the audience to see the role of women in a more complex way. The director aims to highlight the gender inequality that often occurs in traditional stories. By positioning Elodie as the main character who faces not only physical challenges, such as defeating a dragon, but also the inner battle of finding her identity and purpose in life, Fresnadillo changes the prevalent paradigm associated with the role of women in fantasy stories. This not only strengthens Elodie's character as a woman who is not dependent on male help but also expands our view of the possible roles of women within existing social

and structural contexts (Meredith, 2024).

Feminist Representation and Audience Reception of *Damsel*

In an interview with Millie Bobby Brown, the lead actress, she expressed that the representation in this film not only embodies feminism but also serves as a lesson for children, regardless of gender, to reshape their outlook on various aspects of patriarchy and feminism (Cinemablend, 2024). Her point is that since everyone is equal, everyone has the right to be brave and make decisions according to their instincts. Regardless of gender, both men and women have equal rights in decision-making and the right to voice their opinions.

From the interview results with audiences, there are at least three positions related to the audience's expectations from the movie. These three positions refer to Stuart Hall's concept: a Dominant Hegemonic Position, a Negotiated Position, and an Oppositional Position (Hall, 1980).

Audiences in the Dominant Hegemonic Position tend to agree that the film is an excellent example of how women can be portrayed in films without being reduced to stereotypes or tropes. "We're not just seeing 'strong women' or 'feminist icons' – we're seeing real people with complex motivations and personalities. And that's something I think is really important for representation" (Interview with TM, April 21, 2024). One of the dominant hegemonic audiences with the initial TM said that *Damsel* portrays the suffering of women due to patriarchal practices around them. Characters like Elodie, the stepmother, and other victimized women are emphasized to represent feminism, as feminism is a form of support among women. Specifically, the dominant hegemonic type of audience stated that *Damsel* is a film that highlights gender issues and women's rights fulfillment. The character Elodie emerges as a representative of women advocating for gender

equality and justice for fellow women. She refuses to remain silent and chooses to voice her opinions, even if it means challenging existing authorities. The ceremony that requires women to become "substitutes for past wrongs" illustrates the unfair treatment of women in the society depicted in the film. Through the character of Elodie, the film attempts to highlight the importance of giving voice to women who are often marginalized or silenced within patriarchal power structures. Although initially afraid, she never gives up on reclaiming her freedom by leaving the cave inhabited by a dragon seeking revenge against the noble family. It can be interpreted that the cave containing the dragon is a metaphor for how we overcome challenges and learn from those experiences. The key to facing these challenges is courage and steadfastness. This reflects how women should advocate for equal rights in society. Instead of being victims, women should be protagonists, as fundamentally, the rights between men and women should be equal.

The hegemonic dominant audience generally said that they love seeing girls act as important figures. Starting from the heroine, the antagonist dragon, the stepmother, the queen, and the victims are all girls. The audience expressed their feelings regarding the emotional struggles of Elodie with words such as "girl power", "women fighters", and "leader". This clarifies the message from the filmmakers that encourages the focus on women's empowerment. The agreement from these audiences was considered dominant as they generally accepted the dominant idea of female heroes without being associated with the concept of feminism. This could be influenced by the background knowledge gained by the audience, who, after being questioned, had never formally learned about feminism. This opinion is undoubtedly influenced by the aspect of audience knowledge that only accepts the big idea of a work without criticizing or seeing the feminist perspective of the story in this film. They generally

take the dominant idea that was built by the media. According to existing literature, as the dominant ideology influences how femininity and masculinity should behave, the press continues to guide women on the standard of behavior (McQuail, 2010).

The hegemonic dominant audiences explain further on the characterization of women that this movie is much greater than just challenging traditional gender norms; instead, it can be said to be a representation of women who have complex characters. The depiction of complex characters in this film illustrates how the characters in *Damsel* demonstrate resilience, not just the portrayal of strong women. It can be interpreted that the film addresses equality, where every individual is considered equal, emphasizing that all humans are equal and no one should be "sacrificed" in life, and everyone progresses together. The representation of Princess Elodie demonstrates intelligence and bravery, as well as her ability to overcome the patriarchal system within the kingdom. This is unusual and goes against the grain of traditional princesses who often rely on princes to help them. This change is supported by many studies of characters in Disney movies released from the 2000s to 2010s, which display more equal partnerships with princes in rescue missions, and storylines have evolved to include outcomes beyond traditional romantic endings (Barber et al., 2015; Daulay et al., 2022; Hine et al., 2018; Palupi, 2019).

The evolution of these depictions reflects broader societal changes and the influence of feminism, which requires modern women to be aware of and fulfill their self-worth (Gao, 2024). As a result, there is a change in the character of the princess, who initially appears helpless and in need of protection, often does housework and is likely to marry, and, if overweight, ugly, unpleasant, and unmarried, becomes a complete princess character with a romantic narrative that is deeper. In 2009, Disney released an animated

film featuring an African-American princess, marking a shift in the concept of happy endings. The princess in this film is portrayed more realistically; to achieve a happy ending, she cannot merely rely on the presence of a prince but must work hard to attain it herself. In connection with the concept of feminism, the portrayal of women in movies continues to evolve, reflecting the ongoing influence of feminist and postfeminist ideologies. According to (Liu et al., 2021), the transformation of female images in Disney films was expanded following the American feminist movement, and the portrayal of princesses reflects societal changes in the development of women's status and their sense of self.

The second category, the Negotiated Position, perceives that this film powerfully demonstrates feminist values regarding women as heroines in the movie but further examines reality to real-world reality as an inverse comparison. The negotiated audiences appreciate how the representation of the film provides inspiration and new guidance for young women in understanding feminist concepts; however, they still hold the actual reality that the character of Elodie is too exaggerated and does not match reality in the real world. "It is good to see how females can be dominant characters other than Elodie, the queen also, her stepmother, and all the victims; however, I think it is overpowered that they try to make it all females, as I know it's a fairy tale, but a little bit nonsense to relate" (Interview with SK, April 2024).

In the interview, SK acknowledged that the film embraced feminist ideals by featuring dominant female characters such as Elodie, the queen, her stepmother, and various victims. She appreciated seeing women in strong, central roles but found the portrayal somewhat unrealistic. The negotiated audiences argued that the film overemphasized female strength and presented a one-sided perspective. They believed that this focus on female dominance distorted reality and was not entirely believable. SK pointed out

that while it is a fairy tale, the film's depiction of the queen's dominance in the kingdom, which also had a king, was exaggerated. She felt that the queen's character was portrayed as too arrogant and overpowering, overshadowing the king's role and consequently creating an imbalanced plot and making the story less relatable and somewhat nonsensical. Although the intention was to elevate the value of women's abilities as heroines and rulers, the execution seemed to skew too far in favor of female dominance. The negotiated audiences' critique highlights the tension between the film's feminist message and its narrative execution. While the film aims to showcase women's heroism and leadership, the audience felt it did so at the expense of a more balanced and realistic portrayal. Their perspective suggests that the film's attempt to correct traditional gender biases by elevating female characters resulted in an overcompensation that felt artificial. This analysis aligns with broader discussions in media studies about the representation of women. According to (Koushik et al., 2018), women's heroism often goes unnoticed or underappreciated due to societal bias and lack of recognition. By overemphasizing female strength, the film may have unintentionally created a narrative that, while empowering, feels disconnected from the complex realities of gender dynamics. SK's feedback underscores the importance of balanced representation that acknowledges women's strengths and struggles in a way that feels authentic and relatable.

An in-depth analysis of the audience's response to the movie revealed that while most of the negotiated audience accepted the feminist ideology promoted by the film, they struggled to relate to it. Elodie's journey from survival to actively facing and overcoming threats symbolizes her growth and the breaking of traditional gender roles. Her attempts to escape and avoid danger initially reflect her response to her environment.

However, she later decides to confront significant challenges, such as facing the dragon, which underscores her empowerment and the feminist themes in the story. This progression aligns with Naahar's (2024) review of Elodie's character, noting that she begins by merely trying to survive and avoid danger. It is only after a pivotal change in her position relative to her sister that she decides to confront the dragon, eventually playing a crucial role in ending the kingdom's evil. This character highlights the film's intention to portray female empowerment, yet the audience's varied ability to relate to it illustrates the complexities of aligning on-screen representation with viewers' lived experiences. By navigating these intricate dynamics, the film prompts discussions about the portrayal of women and the ongoing challenges in achieving genuine gender equality.

From the analysis conducted, it is relevant that this negotiated group consists of the oldest interviewed audiences, who offer a deeper perspective on the issues. Further investigation reveals that these audiences view the phenomenon with more nuance, particularly concerning women's independence and freedom of choice. They believe that the characterization of Elodie as a heroine does not fully embody true freedom, as she remains entangled in a dynamic requiring her to conform to the desires of the men around her. This perception underscores that, despite the film's intention to portray women as strong and independent, the enduring realities of patriarchal social complexities influence how these characters are understood and received by diverse audiences. Films play a crucial role in challenging existing norms and prompting society to reassess how they view and treat women in daily life. By highlighting the gap between intended representation and actual reception, feminist-themed films encourage deeper contemplation about the progress still needed in achieving genuine gender equality (Hine et al., 2018).

The third category, the Oppositional Position, is the last way the audience decodes the media message, which tends to disagree with how the filmmakers conveyed the feminist message. In the Oppositional Position category, the audience expressed disagreement with how the director conveyed several elements of feminist roles in the film, "I think this movie is more inclined to the suffering of women due to the patriarchal social system rather than women empowerment. You see … all the girl characters suffer" (Interview with AM, April 2024)

One of the primary sources of conflict in the story is when Elodie's father decides to marry her to an unknown prince without her consent. This reflects a social reality where decisions made by men are often considered final and unquestionable, while women were expected to accept them without protest. A striking difference is how men can freely make decisions while women merely follow. It was supported by the review (Naahar, 2024), which mentioned the main female character as ignorant for not

questioning her father's decision to marry her. The father hid his motivation to undergo a ritual of tactical moves to gain a higher status in society. In the beginning, Elodie, as a daughter and woman, initially resisted and protested but did not question why her father did not seek her consent first. However, through various subtle persuasions, her father convinces Elodie to consider the plight of their kingdom, threatened by poverty and hunger, leading her to accept his decision. This means that in the storyline, Elodie is given equal standing by her father to voice her opinion, implying that women are only allowed to express opinions but not to make decisions, as men's ultimate decision-making power remains. It also highlights the dynamics of selfishness that usually occur where men's interests frequently take precedence, as with Elodie, who falls victim to the ambitions of the prince's family.

This approach indirectly illustrates a critique of the patriarchy that still exists in society, where women are often confined to the role of

being submissive or victims of a more dominant power structure. It reflects the ongoing debate on how gender equality should be applied in everyday life, not only as a concept but in concrete actions (Singer, 2023). It can be interpreted as a strong idea regarding human capacity that, above all, the idea that every individual is free to choose anything they desire or choose from various options and decide what suits them best is lacking. In humanist theory, a person is seen as either active or passive. Thus, one acts freely or is forced to do something they did not choose to do (Wolf, 1992). All these opinions were considered patriarchal because they depict male selfishness in achieving their desires, highlighting the inherent selfishness of men, as seen when Elodie becomes a victim of the prince's royal family.

All these opinions reflect doubts about the film's ability to portray complex issues such as gender equality in a way that is acceptable and relevant in an authentic context. After further investigation, it turns out that the audiences in this position had studied the concept of feminism formally in college and could see the implied meaning in the movie and relate it to the social reality they were familiar with. They acknowledged that the film could not possibly represent every aspect of real life in detail. Still, they appreciated how the film challenged patriarchal structures by portraying women as active and independent actors in their struggles. Thus, this research shows how formal education can influence how one interprets and accepts the messages conveyed by the media, including movies. Despite the agreement of some audiences towards the film's presentation, formal educational students can enable viewers to see beyond the story being told and delve into deeper meanings and implications related to complex social issues such as feminism and the role of women in society.

Impact of Sociocultural Background on Interpretation

From the result of further analysis, audiences can be classified based on several

aspects, such as age and educational background. This selection of diverse audiences is intended to provide different points of view on the feminist themes presented in the film and observe how the generalization of these messages can be fulfilled or not fulfilled by various social groups. Each individual in this study brings different educational backgrounds, diverse genders, and diverse knowledge, which naturally influences how they assess and interpret film messages. These social categories cause variations in individuals' views of certain social situations, even though they may share the same environment. This theory emphasizes that a person's life experiences, knowledge, and communicative behavior are primarily shaped by the social group to which they belong and their identity (Huirem et al., 2020).

Audience members who have an educational background in the humanities, especially those who have received formal teaching on feminism, are expected to have the ability to conduct in-depth criticism of cultural products such as films. In this research, they are likely to analyze the film from a critical perspective, identifying and assessing gender representations as well as conformity to the feminist theories they have learned. They have a theoretical framework that allows them to compare the representations in the movie with the existing social reality, resulting in a more complex and informative critique. On the other hand, the interview results show that age also affects how audiences capture messages from cultural products. Despite having no formal education in feminism or other humanities fields, mature audiences have the ability not to take media messages at face value. Adult audiences tend to compare the messages conveyed by the media and the reality in their social environment. Their life experiences and social interactions help them to understand and criticize cultural products more thoughtfully and contextually. These findings are consistent with other

research (Zhang, 2019) that highlights the importance of considering sociocultural factors in understanding how individuals generate and interpret meaning from media messages. Social identity and context play an important role in the negotiation of meaning, especially in complex contexts such as feminist messages in the media. By understanding this variability in viewpoints, we can better understand how different audiences receive and process these messages.

In understanding the ideas of feminism on the basis of female heroes in this film, it can be seen that the majority of the audience belongs to the hegemonic dominant position. Four out of eight audience members agree and accept the concept of feminism that is explained throughout this movie. Apart from the audience grouping, all audiences agreed that Elodie's character provides a fresh portrayal of women in media, challenging the conventional depiction of women as weak and needing rescue by men for happiness or salvation. The concept of 'Damsels in Distress', which

has long been entrenched in popular culture, depicts women as weak and in need of rescue by men. However, Elodie's character challenges this stereotype by becoming her own hero, without needing help or rescue from men to achieve happiness or salvation. This approach is in line with the principles of feminism, which emphasizes the equality of women and men in social, economic, and political life (Cattien, 2019). The influence of this film in changing the perception of the word 'damsel' to a more positive one and encouraging a broader understanding of women's abilities and strength in a modern context is significant. Films like "Damsel" are not only entertaining but also have the potential to be agents of social change with narrative shifts that have long been embedded in our culture (Wilkinson, 2024).

The concept of feminism, according to (Rokhmansyah, 2016), advocates that the transformation of the patriarchal system can be achieved by changing the attitudes of individuals,

especially women, in their relationships with men. This view emphasizes the importance of women being independent economically, socially, and politically and not depending on the help or protection of men to achieve the promised life. In the context of Elodie's character in the film, although oppositional audiences criticized Elodie's representation as too strong and interpreted it as a representation, she still receives help from her father when she is in critical condition. This indicates that, in reality, women can be independent but can also accept and appreciate help from men or other people when needed.

Feminism emphasizes the principle that every individual has the fundamental right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of gender. This view opposes the patriarchal system, which limits women in various aspects of life by changing individual attitudes, especially women's attitudes towards men, as a step to change the existing social structure (Rokhmansyah,

2016). This contrasts the biological view, which often uses biological differences to classify gender roles and abilities. Feminism also encourages more comprehensive women's access to education and employment opportunities as the key to eliminating discrimination and social disparities between men and women. The essence of this movement is to achieve substantial equality in various areas of life, from political and economic to cultural and social. The film "Damsel" presents a strong image that women can be equal, even more potent than men. The positive impact of this approach was written by (Seitz, 2024) in The Wrap magazine, in which he mentioned that *Damsel* successfully became one of the most popular films on Netflix, one of the ten most popular films of all time on Netflix's list. This action film debuted as the No. 8 most-watched British film on the streamer, with 137.2 million views in its first 87 days on Netflix. He further explained that the film's successful debut shows a strong demand for stories featuring strong,

independent female heroes. Overall, "Damsel" is an entertaining action film and a work of art that played an essential role in changing views and expanding the understanding of women in popular culture.

The Evolution of Female Representation in Films

The film *Damsel* achieved significant achievements primarily because of its motif that shifted the conventional paradigm regarding the character of a royal princess. This concept emerged from the desire to explore female characters in a braver and independent context rather than just presenting them as figures waiting for rescue from men. Traditional depictions of royal princesses often place her in a passive role, dependent on men to protect or save her. According to (Pratiwi et al., 2022), this stereotype implies that women do not need to show courage or initiative in facing challenges because a male figure will act for them. *Damsel* promises this paradigm by presenting Elodie as an intelligent, brave, and active main

character taking control of her destiny. When Elodie is trapped in the cave, she does not wait for outside help but instead gets support and guidance from other survivors who have had similar experiences. This reflects solidarity between women, where women support and inspire each other to overcome difficulties. The role of Elodie's stepmother also shows the complex dynamics of female relationships in this story. When the stepmother realizes the incompatibility in the marriage arranged for Elodie, she not only pretends not to notice but acts based on her concern for Elodie. This highlights that female relationships in stories are not always about competition or betrayal but also about supporting each other in achieving common goals. In addition, *Damsel* depicts courage, intelligence, and the maturation process of female characters. This shows that fairy tales do not always have to end with the presence of a prince who "saves" the princess from difficulties. Instead, Elodie and the other female characters in this film find

happiness and justice through their own strength and intelligence (Karmakar et al., 2023).

In the context of audience perception of the movie, there are mixed expectations, especially regarding the representation of feminism. While the plot of the movie is well-packaged and effectively highlights feminist themes, certain aspects may disappoint the audience in terms of the narrative presented. One of the movie's main strengths is its depiction of the importance of women facing challenges and developing into stronger individuals. This is exemplified by the character of Elodie, who shows courage and independence in overcoming various obstacles throughout the story. Elodie's journey emphasizes the film's feminist message by featuring a female protagonist who does not rely on male support to succeed. Her character development from passive to active agent in her destiny resonates with audiences who value strong female leads. However, despite this positive portrayal, audiences may feel that the film's narrative oversimplifies or distorts reality, especially in its depiction of gender dynamics. In short, while *Damsel* effectively conveys the theme of female empowerment through the character of Elodie, audience reactions may be mixed due to flaws in the film's representation of feminism. The movie successfully portrays female strength and independence but may also face criticism for its approach to gender issues.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the research only involved a small sample of respondents, which may not represent the broader audience in general. This limitation may affect the generalization of research results to the population. In addition, the research focuses only on one particular film, namely *Damsel*, so it cannot comprehensively represent all films that depict the theme of femininity in different ways. Therefore, to increase the validity and

generalizability of the findings, future research is recommended to conduct studies on a larger scale and include various films that raise the theme of femininity. This can provide deeper insight into how general audiences respond and interpret representations of women in the media and how messages about gender equality are conveyed and received by the broader community through film.

CONCLUSION

Based on this research's findings, audiences and film reviewers generally consider this film to contain the idea of feminism explicitly and implicitly. Still, there are some contradictory aspects about the approval of representation shown in this film. From the decoded messages, the findings show that the hegemonic dominant audience agreed that there was a concept of feminism explained through the heroine; however, the negotiated audience found it unrealistic due to the overpowering female characterization, and the oppositional audience found

that the movie depicted women's suffering due to the patriarchal system rather than women's empowerment. Despite the disagreement, the majority of the audience's responses indicated an agreement where they acknowledge the feminist values in the film so that, accordingly, this film stands out among many hero-centric films by highlighting a fresh portrayal of women in media, challenging the conventional depiction of women as weak and needing rescue by men for happiness or salvation.

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Applying Critical Race Theory to Racially-Mixed Asian-Americans Depicted in Kevin Kwan's *Sex and Vanity*

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ABSTRACT

Michele Yeoh, being the first Asian actress to win an Oscar, might be taken as the model minority, despite Asian immigrants receiving inhumane treatment suspending them from citizenship. Marriage was encouraged to be a US citizen, giving birth to Eurasian children, who can be confused by their parents' racial differences. They neither have a connection to their parents nor acceptance from either of their parents' races. This in-between dynamic is explored in Kwan's *Sex and Vanity* through Lucie Churchill, whose mother is Asian and father was white. Her life is filled with biracial discrimination. This article was researched by applying four theories: Post-nationalist American Studies; Critical Race Theory; Blank, Dabady and Citro's discrimination types; and Aguirre and Turner's reaction types. The findings show that most discrimination types are subtle, unconscious, automatic discrimination, and most reaction types are spontaneous ones. The discrimination and reactions are less vulgar because the upper class apprehends racism in the forms of intentional, explicit discrimination, e.g., physical attack and extermination, are unforgivable. The conclusion drawn is that nonextreme forms still damage mixed-race individuals. This article then argues that identity construction crisscrosses how one identifies himself or herself and how others identify him or her.

Keywords: *biracial discrimination; Eurasian; identity; popular fiction; romance*

INTRODUCTION

At the 2023 Academy Awards, Michelle Yeoh, a Malaysian actress, won an Oscar for 'Best Actress in a Leading Role' for *Everything Everywhere All at Once* -- a movie about a Chinese immigrant in the US. She is the first Asian actor to win the prestigious category in the 95 years the ceremony has been held (Specter, 2023). This victory might be taken as the peak of the stereotype of Asian descendants in the US as a model minority.

In actuality, since the Chinese Great Migration in the mid-1800s, immigrants from China to the US have often received inhumane treatment, both by society and the state. One of them was the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This law specifically suspended immigration for Asian immigrants. Therefore, it was impossible for them to obtain citizenship status in the US (Wu, 2023). The only way to become a US citizen at that time was through marriage, as encouraged by the Mixed Marriage Policy of 1942 (Pree, 2019, 64).

Marriages between white and Asian people give birth to mixed-race children, also called 'Eurasian', a portmanteau of 'European' and 'Asian'. Although automatically US citizens, their lives will lean more towards the parent whose DNA they inherit more (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018, 87). When they have White physical characteristics, they are more accepted in society because they are considered the majority. However, when their physical characteristics are more like Asians, they are classified as a minority.

Moreover, the two races have different historical and socioeconomic aspects. The differences are confusing for mixed-race individuals. On one hand, they feel like they have no connection to both parents. On the other hand, they are often not accepted by both white people and Chinese people (Rosado, 1994, 16). Consequently, they often face challenges in finding their place amidst existing racial and cultural differences in the wider society and within their ethnic community.

Racially mixed Asian Americans' experiences are underexplored in mainstream discourse. Often only given the backseat, inclusions of them

are mere tokenism (Adhitya & Wulandari, 2021, 29). A notable work in taking their existence center stage is Jenny Han's *The Summer I Turned Pretty* trilogy, whose first installment was released in 2009. As a young-adult romance (Slaton, 2022), its story focuses more on teenage puppy love. It was not until a decade later when Kevin Kwan reconnoiters complex in-between dynamics in Kevin Kwan's *Sex and Vanity* (2020).

Set in Capri and New York, the heroine is Lucie Tang Churchill, who was born to a "third-generation Asian American" (Kwan, 2020, 83) and "a true blue-blooded New Yorker" (*ibid*. 167). The couple is "a classy union of old money and new money … a beautiful power couple" (*ibid*. 167). Despite the glamour and luxury in her upbringing, the novel depicts her life as filled with friction resulting from being mixed-race, from both sides of her family and the strangers she encounters. Even in some parts, Lucie's internal conflicts about her Asian origin are also depicted.

The novel presents a unique opportunity to analyze the intersections of race, class, and cultural identity in a globalized context, where issues of ethnicity and racial purity are increasingly pertinent. According to Mehta (2023),

> we all do racist things, we are all implicated and shaped, in our unconscious, by the systems that govern our society.
> ...
> This does several things to the mixed race child, leaning on their white relatives for support as they navigate a racist world.
> ...
> [but] The white parent, grandparent, or other family member has no experience navigating the world as a person of color and so they do not know what the child is going through.

Racism, especially in the context of mixed race, can happen to and from anyone. Intended or not, someone can act in a racist behavior towards themselves or even towards someone they care about. The inability to see racism can cause prolonged and fatal friction and conflicts (Indriyanto, Adi & Adhitya, 2024, 186).

The absence of clear boundaries causes racism to manifest in various aspects and forms in countless situations. The consequences that can be caused and the responses that arise to racism also have varying degrees of fatality. Thus, the ability to navigate actions to avoid racism is

important to acquire (Putri, Adhitya & Kristiawan, 2024, 38).

Being the first study on the novel, the formulations of the problem include (1) "How is Lucie Churchill biracially discriminated? and (2) "How did she overcome the biracial discrimination?". By doing so, this research will shed light on how mixed-race identities are represented in literary works and how those representations shed light on their impact on mixed-race individuals.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the intersectional and relational nature of the topic, this study is interdisciplinary. Conducted deductively, its theoretical framework consists of four theories. (1) Post-Nationalist American Studies is implemented as the scope. The paradigm shifts away from the exceptionalist notions of nation-state-centric identity and belonging, which often rigidly exclude individuals who exist between or outside of the dominant groups. It emphasizes what constitutes Americanness itself is continuously negotiated by everyone, including racial, ethnic, class, and gender minorities (Adi, 2023, 100).

(2) Critical Race Theory is applied as the analytical construct. CRT highlights how race affects everyone's experiences as it underlies power dynamics, legal systems, and cultural norms that can perpetuate racial inequality. There are five 'Central Principles of CRT (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). (a) Centrality of Racism denotes that racism is deeply and widely integrated into society, to the extent it is considered normal (Delgado, 2009). (b) White Supremacy signifies the normalization of white privilege and the reinforcement of suppression (Montoya et al., 2016). (c) Voices of People of Color is the counter storytelling by PoC (Lynn & Parker, 2006). (d) Interest Convergence designates that racial equality is upheld only when it benefits the Whites (Fernando & Rinaldi, 2017). (e) Intersectionality conveys that everyone has multiple identity markers (Khan, 2016).

(3) Blank, Dabady and Citro's classification of discrimination (2004, 56-63) is exerted to understand what mixed-race individuals endure. There are four discrimination types: (a) Intentional, explicit discrimination, in the form of verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and

extermination; (b) Subtle, unconscious, automatic discrimination, in the form of subtle prejudice, indirect prejudice, ambivalence, and automatic prejudice; (c) Statistical discrimination and profiling; and (d) Organizational processes.

(4) Aguirre and Turner's classification of reactions (2004, 25) is wielded to apprehend how mixed-race individuals react toward racial discrimination. There are seven reaction types: (a) passive acceptance, (b) marginal participation, (c) assimilation, (d) ethnogenesis, (e) withdrawal and self-segregation, (f) rebellion and revolt, and (g) organized protest.

Combining these four theories will yield a nuanced analysis of the lived experiences of racially mixed Asian Americans. The primary data are presented in the form of quotations from the novel. The emboldened parts indicate the type of discrimination, whereas the underlined ones denote the type of reaction. The italicized parts are written as they are in the novel.

DISCUSSION

Unlike his first trilogy, which discusses the intricacy

of Chinese ethnicity (Adhitya & Kurnia, 2017, 28), Kwan's *Sex and Vanity* explores how race, class, identity, and belonging intersect through the lens of a racially mixed character. The analysis will thus examine the biracial discrimination Lucie encounters, which poses challenges to how she identifies herself.

The novel is set in 2013 and 2019. By then, interracial marriages have been happening for centuries and thus a common phenomenon. Yet, Lucie's life is still shaped by biracial discrimination from the moment she was born.

> Lucie knew only too well that for Cacky and her Boston Brahmin crowd, being "Very social and entertaining a great deal" was one of the worst insults could give. High WASPs like Cacky didn't need to throw parties, be photographed at "society events," or endow wings at museums to comment on their social position they simply were privileged. She realized that she had one-upped Cacky by marrying a man whose vast fortune eclipsed even hers, and Cacky was feeling sore about it. **Her cousin had always been competitive and a little mean since they were kids, calling her nicknames like "Lucy Liu" and "Shun Lee Lucie."** <u>She decided to ignore her barbed comments, even though Cacky would not</u>

<u>let go of her strange fixation on Cecil's mother.</u>
<div align="right">(Kwan, 2020, 172-3)</div>

The verbal antagonism, uttered by Lucie's white cousin, "includes casual racial slurs and disparaging racial comments, either in or out of the target's presence" (Blank, Dabady & Ctro, 2004, 56). She reacts with withdrawal and self-segregation by turning a deaf ear, rather than getting her feeling hurt.

All her life, people have mistaken Lucie for not being a part of her extended family because she looks like her mother "with her peachy-white cheeks and delicate black eyelashes, … she looked like the most adorable, exquisite little China doll!" (Kwan, 2020, 182).

> **"We go first to your room, and then I will take your friend to her room,"** Paolo said to Charlotte.
> "She's my cousin," Charlotte corrected
> **"Oh? Your cousin?" Paolo glanced reflexively at Lucie in surprise.** <u>But Lucie simply smiled. She knew that within the next few seconds, Charlotte would automatically launch into the explanation she had always given since Lucie was a little girl.</u>
> "Yes, her father was my uncle," Charlotte replies, adding "Her mother is Chinese, but her father is American."
> *<u>So is Mom. She was born in Seattle</u>*<u>, Lucie wanted to say, but of course, she didn't.</u>
> <div align="right">(Kwan, 2020, 15)</div>

At first encounter, nobody automatically thinks Lucie and her white cousin are blood-related. This automatic prejudice is followed by an instant disbelief. Lucie's reaction to such a reflex is passive acceptance as she lets her cousin explain her racial background.

Growing up, due to her appearance, Lucie is treated differently from his older brother, who takes "after their father in appearance … the quintessential WASP" (*ibid*. 64) with Caucasian-dominant features and dark blond curls (*ibid*. 157).

> **"I was in my workout clothes, holding a big paper sack with takeout. Some lady got into the elevator with us, obviously a visitor, and she smiled at me and asked, 'Do you get good tips?'"**
> George stared blankly at Lucie. "What did she mean?"
> "<u>Well, I had no clue either</u>, but **when Freddie started laughing hysterically, I finally figured it out. The lady thought I was delivering food. Like I was some Chinese delivery girl.** <u>That's always the story with me</u>, **but no one would ever**

mistake Freddie for the help."

(Kwan, 2020, 15)

Because she looks more Asian, Lucie often experiences statistical discrimination and profiling. As mainstream media portray Asians as manual laborers (Marchesin, 2021); when Lucie is in luxurious surroundings, she is assumed to be the domestic worker. Her reaction is passive acceptance as she "tolerate[s] unacceptable things … and make no attempt to hold the other person accountable while complaining" about how others treat her (Downing, 2010).

As the plot thickens, Lucie marrying a New Money white man becomes the butt of the joke for the white part of her family.

Lucie looked at her mother for some support, but Marian seemed totally checked out—as she always did around her father's family—and was fixated on picking the bits of dill off her smoked salmon crostini. Annafred, thankfully, leaped to her defense again.
"Don't be ridiculous, Aunt Cushing. Renee Pike may be social with capital S, but she's actually done quite a bit of good. The *Times* listed her as the most charitable individual in the country last year! Speaking of which, Teddy, we really need to get her involved

with the Prince's Trust. I'm told she's singlehandedly keeping the oldest lace maker in France in business, thanks to her commitment to only wear couture."
"My, my, Lucie, are we dressed up enough for your new family? I hope you won't be too embarrassed of us," Cacky teased, as she adjusted the cuffed sleeves of her floral Carlisle jacket.

(Kwan, 2020, 173)

Lucie's white family thinks less of her Asian family as they do not think her mother "would know this particularly glamorous ladies" (*ibid*. 164) Hollywood's depiction of Asians as tacky (Blair, 2018) has engraved in society that White, Old-Money Americans align them with White New-Money Americans. Her white cousin then extends indirect prejudice to her fiancé as well because it

"leads ingroup members to blame the outgroup----the disadvantaged racial group---for their disadvantage … Differences between the ingroup and outgroup … are often exaggerated, so that outgroup members are portrayed as outsiders worthy of avoidance and exclusion" (Blank, Dabady & Ctro, 2004, 59).

Lucie reacts with passive acceptance as she "just accepts without making an attempt to respond" (Downing, 2010) because she does not have the

power to defend herself in front of her White family.

Adding insult to injury, just as mixed-raced individuals are deemed ambiguous, so is biracial discrimination. The many types it can take form, that is how many sources it can come from (Ho, 2015), including from the loved ones.

Lucie wanted to roll her eyes but kept herself in check. She knew this game of her cousin's all too well—Charlotte was the queen of guilt trips, and now she was looking her straight in the eye. "Lucie, everything I do, I do with the best intentions. I'm here out of your generosity, and **my only interest is in safeguarding your good name.**"
"My good name? You sound as if we're living in the Edwardian age!" Lucie laughed.
"Lucie, you are a Churchill, don't ever forget that. Your name and standing are everything; wherever you go, you represent the family."
(Kwan, 2020, 27)

Lucie's closest cousin, who is white, disassociates her Asian heritage. This avoidance "entails choosing the comfort of one's own social group (the ingroup in social psychological terms)", which in her case is White privilege. How she reacts is marginal participation by playing along while silently detesting it.

Eventually, Lucie's patience reaches a boiling point after years of holding back.

"Are you really changing your tune now? **All my life, all you Barclays and Churchills have made me feel like I wasn't really part of the family, like I was some little troll in the attic.**"
"What are you talking about? We've done no such thing!"
"Why is it that **every time you introduce me to someone new, you have to explain to them exactly how we're related? Our racist grandmother does the exact same thing, as if no one would ever believe from looking at my face that I was really a Churchill, a bona fide Mayflower Knickerbocker Social Register Churchill!**"
"Lucie, our grandmother is many things, but the one thing she is not is racist. She is an insufferable snob and a creature of her background, and she has many limitations that I myself have been victim to."
Lucie shook her head vehemently. "I'm sorry, but Granny is a racist."
"But Granny loves you!" Charlotte insisted.
"Don't you see it's possible to love someone without realizing you're being racist toward them? How can you not see it? Especially after the way Granny treated you over your Jewish boyfriend?"
(Kwan, 2020, chapter 16)

It is assumed that, on the one hand, having more than one

heritage allows mixed-raced individuals to belong to more than one culture. On the other hand, they might feel alienated in either one since biracial discrimination can be done by immediate family members (Mehta, 2023, 2). Throughout her life, Lucie's White family effectuates avoidance of her Asianness to the extent that she perpetrates rebellion and revolt by venting her frustration to her cousin, including that of their grandmother.

Furthermore, mixed-race individuals experience racial confusion dialectically. Not only do they internally question their own identity, but others also ask them how they racialize themselves, which adds to their confusion.

> **"Tell me, dear, what do you consider yourself?"**
> **"I'm not sure what you mean."**
> **"When you look in the mirror, do you feel more Asian or more Caucasian?"**
> **"Well, I'm equal parts both . . ."**
> **"But do you lean toward a particular side? It's rather marvelous that you could pass for either."**
> Lucie gritted her teeth, finally angry. "You know, I've never tried to pass for anything. I feel like I'm just me."
> (Kwan, 2020, 71)

Lucie, whenever people cannot put their finger on her ethnicity, endures ambivalence, in which she is "not necessarily subjected to uniform antipathy … [and] may be disrespected but liked in a condescending manner" (Blank, Dabady & Ctro, 2004, 60). She gets asked probing questions about her racial identity that she never asks to herself, at least not out loud. One of them is about passing, a practice of mixed-race individuals eliminating the less for more privileged race.

Lucie's reaction is ethnogenesis, in that she "comes into being and develops into an ethnicity distinct from the surrounding culture" (Fitzgerald, 1993) of her White side of the family. She does not need to pick one of her parents' races and declare it as her identity because her mixedness is her identity.

Surprisingly, racism towards Lucie being a racially mixed Asian American also comes from other Asians.

> **Mercedes jumped into the conversation. "And your father, what is his ancestry?"**
> "English, Scottish, and Swedish," Lucie replied as patiently as she could. Why was it that only other Asians interrogated her about her background?

(Kwan, 2020, 114)

Often being over-generalized under one umbrella term (Joo, Reeves & Rodrigue, 2016), there are "21 detailed different groups" of Asian diasporas in the US (Monte & Shin, 2022). The differences are used to define social standing (Seida, 2015). By asking about her white family's heritage, the Filipino woman assesses how she and Lucie fall in rank. Lucie's habitual reaction to the indirect prejudice is marginal participation by answering the question dismissively because she does not care about any subsequent perception.

Even the legitimacy of her last name is questioned.

> **"This would be your Churchill grandmother? Tell me, how exactly are you all related to the English Churchills?"**
> Lucie reached for the crystal goblet in front of her. She wasn't much of a drinker, but if she had to endure this inquisition for another three courses, she might as well get completely shit-faced.
>
> (Kwan, 2020, 115)

To further place her social standing, Lucie is asked in detail about her white heritage. The question does not infect her directly, but its implication infers a demeaning intent. She reacts to the indirect prejudice with rebellion and revolt as she does not express her anger verbally but chooses to drink as a rebellious act.

Considering she is "quiet and well-mannered … [and that] her father would be so proud" (*ibid*. 182), people set Lucie high expectations. Once she does something out of the ordinary, she gets crucified.

> Suddenly, a chorus of voices began to crowd her head. The voices of her relatives, her neighbors, her college friends, her classmates back at Brearley. . .
> **"You'll never guess what Lucie was caught doing in Capri."**
> **"Who would have imagined that Lucie Churchill, who only dated the preppiest guys and wouldn't even give Stavros Theodoracopulos the time of day, would end up falling for a Chinese boy from Hong Kong?"**
> **"A Chinese boy who goes to Berkely, off all places."**
> **"He wears a Speedo and Birkenstocks. Together."**
> **"Ewww!"**
> **"Have you seen that mother of his? NOCD."**
> "I suppose it's fine that she's fallen for someone like him since Lucie's never cared about joining Piping Rock."
> "Have you fallen for him?" Suddenly Lucie realized Charlotte had been speaking to her all along. "Answer me, Lucie, so I can best help you clean up this mess,"

Lucie shook her head vehemently. "I haven't fallen for him, Charlotte. I am not even attracted to him! It was all a mistake! I just had a wild moment."
(Kwan, 2020, 147)

Lucie is put on the pedestal of perfection. When her action or choice fails to meet their expectations, it is blown out of proportion. It is an aftermath of the model minority, which "has been attributed to Asians being hardworking and deferential to parental and authority figures" (Ruiz, Im & Tian, 2023).

The indirect prejudice is done by commenting on the person Lucie is close with to indirectly judge her. Her response is assimilation as she conforms to the dominant race and neglects the values that her other racial background is known for. To the extent that biracial discrimination is internalized.

"So why did you tell him you didn't? Why did you have to go and break my boy's heart?"
Lucie crumbled onto the sofa. "I don't know. I was confused, I was ashamed. I was afraid of what my family would say …"
"Your family? Do you mean your mother?"
"My mother, yes, but also my extended family. You don't know what it's like for me. **Ever since I was little,**

it's always seemed like my mother's only wanted me to be around my dad's family. It's as though Mom's ashamed of her Chinese roots—I hardly ever see my Chinese grandparents. I know she rebelled against her parents by marrying my dad, and **I didn't think she'd ever want me to fall in love with a Chinese boy either. And I thought my father's family would be disappointed in me if I didn't marry some billionaire prince.** I've been in a no-win situation all my life. **My Chinese relatives treat me like I'm some sort of precious unicorn, too good to be one of them, and my WASP relatives treat me like I'm not good enough for them,"** Lucie cried.
(Kwan, 2020, 329)

The intricate intersection of race and identity Lucie witnesses is absorbed into the internalized racism she battles on a daily basis. According to Johnson (2008, 45), "internalized racism involves both conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above people of color". The internalized racism then becomes indirect prejudice, as she does not perceive it firsthand, but she is still affected by it.

Her usual reaction to discrimination is passive acceptance since she usually

"passively allow anything that comes" (Downing, 2010). In other incidents, she is portrayed as), "said quietly exasperated (Kwan, 2020, 131), "remained silent" (*ibid*., 145), "wanted to defenf her mother, but she knew she wasn't even in a position to defend herself (*ibid*., 147) and "need to dig a hole and bury myself in it right now" (*ibid*., 174). The unassertive reaction further affiliates the model minority stereotype that "characterizes Asian Americans as a polite, law-abiding group who have achieved a higher level of success than the general population through some combination of innate talent and pull-yourselves-up-by-your-bootstraps immigrant striving" (Blackburn, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Kwan's *Sex and Vanity* depicts biracial discrimination within the top echelon of society. Most of the discrimination types taking place are subtle, unconscious, automatic discrimination. Most reaction types appearing are spontaneous ones, while organized protest is not. The instances of biracial discrimination and reactions to them are less vulgar because, as well-brought-up upper crusts, they apprehend that rampant racism in forms of intentional, explicit discrimination, e.g., physical attack and extermination, are unforgivable. Nonetheless, nonextreme forms of discrimination can still damage racially mixed individuals. The reason is that identity construction crisscrosses how one identifies himself or herself and how others identify him or her.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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Retelling Folklore in the 21st Century Children's Literature: A Comparative Study on Children's Book Series by Okky Madasari and Daniel Pinkwater

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ABSTRACT

This study searches out, observes, and analyzes the elements of folklore in the children's book series by two authors with different cultural backgrounds: Indonesian background and American background. For the analysis of the Indonesian author's works, this study chooses the adventure series of a child named Matara, a.k.a. Mata, written by Okky Madasari, an Indonesian writer who was previously known as a writer of literary works that are quite idealistic. From her Mata adventure series, this research discusses three works, namely the series *Mata Di Tanah Melus* (2018), *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi* (2019), and *Mata dan Manusia Laut* (2019). For the work of the American writer, this study selects Daniel Pinkwater's children's book, Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Chicken (2010). All the works discussed in this paper are works of 21st-century children's literature, the results of which are expected to provide new insights into the repertoire of children's literature studies, especially those related to Indonesian and American children's literature. The study of these works found that the forms of elements of culture and folklore can be used to convey social criticism to certain parties. In this case, there is society and authority. Above all, this study underlines that there are distinct presentations of those criticisms that utilize myths, folklore, and cultural symbols by Indonesian and American children's book authors.

Keywords: *adventure; children's literature, comparative study; cultural symbols; folklore*

INTRODUCTION

When building storylines, settings, or characterizations, writers may use folklore elements in children's literature. In this case, the use of folklore elements can be analogous to the extensive use of stereotyping on clichéd characters in literature in general, specifically in popular and children's literature. The characters loaded with the formation of these stereotypes are viewed as "super" characters that readers can instantly digest so easily. From the readers' perspective, those characters that are far from complex are very easy to guess, casually and effortlessly, giving rise to a comfortable impression (light mood) when enjoying popular literary works.

Likewise, with folklore elements, the nature of high familiarity causes the folklore elements to serve as a tool that helps readers digest and appreciate the work easily, including the storyline, characterizations, or settings in children's literature. In other words, when viewed from the other side, these elements help writers to convey their ideas more easily.

The differences between Indonesian and American cultural backgrounds need to be discussed and analyzed to see to what extent they influence the appearance of folklore content in children's literary works or just the ideas related to it implicitly. In this case, examining how far folklore can contain what Slotkin and Scheick (1980) consider a cultural symbol is necessary.

Accordingly, this study chooses to explore the elements of folklore found in a collection of children's books written by two authors from different cultural backgrounds, one from Indonesia and the other from the United States. It examines the works of Indonesian author Okky Madasari, known for her previously idealistic literature, focusing on her adventure series featuring a child protagonist named Matara, or Mata. Specifically, the study analyzes three of her books: *Mata Di Tanah Melus* (2018), *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi* (2019), and *Mata dan Manusia Laut* (2019). On the American side, the study looks at *Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Chicken* (2010), a children's book by Daniel Pinkwater.

By exploring cultural symbols found in the works

written by authors with different cultural backgrounds, this research aims to figure out and investigate the cultural peculiarities contained in certain literary works, especially children's literature, so that they can reveal a culture that can be used as a guide in expressing and further analyzing the symptoms or problems encountered in society, especially concerning culture, both in Indonesian and American society.

Traced from the history of the formation of the genre of children's literature to the form it is known today, folklore is a fundamental part of it. Folklore elements, more or less, have become an integral part of children's literature (Rose, 1984; Reynolds, 2007). Children's literature can generally be distinguished from canon literature and popular literature in terms of its pragmatic content. The pragmatic content is related to the function of children's literary works as a tool, media, or means of carrying out or achieving certain goals. The most visible goal throughout the history of children's literature is related to education. Some experts or experts in the study of children's literature object to

the statement above, especially those researching post-romantic children's literature, or even works often referred to as radical children's literature (see Mickenberg and Nel, 2011). Reynolds, paraphrasing Jack Zipes, argues that the fantasy in folklore and children's literature serves a cultural purpose, helping to transmit values and "civilize" young readers. In other words, Reynolds reaffirms that folklore and children's stories are significant in conveying cultural traditions within and between generations. (Zipes in Reynolds, 2007, 2)

Rennick (2001) reveals that folklore is "the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people," including traditions commonly found in a culture, subculture, or group. These traditions can appear as saga (tales), proverbs, and proverbs (jokes). Rennick further explained that

> folklore involves the actual process of creating and producing these products—the behaviors of composing and singing a song, making up and telling a story, designing and constructing an artifact, dancing and so on. (Rennick, 2001 35)

Rennick suggested that in addition to covering the

results or products produced, folklore also includes the process of creation and behavior in that creation, for example, behavior in composing and singing songs, creating and telling a fairy tale, designing activities, or building an artifact, dancing and so on. This research is in transnational American Studies, which examines cross-cultural works while still observing American values, in this case, the material objects studied.

METHODOLOGY

This research applies qualitative research methods, starting with literary studies, followed by cultural research with a classical American Studies perspective, namely Myth-and Symbol, first initiated by Henry Nash Smith and Allan Trachtenberg. This classical method is used because this study intends to examine cross-cultural symbols, namely Indonesian and American cultural images, and to find, observe, and interpret cultural symbols and images as suggested by Slotkin and Scheick. Bruce Kuklick (1972) suggested something related to what he called a "mental picture" to denote mental objects such as images, feelings, experiences, references, or associations, which are equally useful to

construct reality. According to Kucklick (1972, 436),

> Suppose I see a man on the corner, and come home and write a story about him. The "mental picture" I have in mind when I write about him is an image when I merely wish to designate or refer to the man. I name this image with the phrase "the man on the corner." If I want to speak of the symbol or myth of the man on the corner, I am making the image "carry a burden of implication (value, association, feeling, or, in a word, meaning) beyond that which is required for mere reference." We invest the image with much more than a denotational quality; we enable it to connote moral, intellectual and emotional qualities of wider and wider range.

From the above quotation, it can be seen that Kucklick has a perspective that considers symbols and myths that are not objectively factual and can contribute to the construct because they may refer to empirical facts, though they are never factual. He (1972, 436) stated that,

> But symbols and myths at best reflect empirical fact, and so are never themselves factual; they are "products of the imagination," "complex mental construct[s]." So if images are of the order of

symbols and myths, and the latter are not factual but "mental constructs," then images are also mental constructs, states of mind, however accurately they may refer to the factual.

Consequently, by applying those theories, this study will consider all mental images and symbols found in the literary works as equally important as the historical facts contributing to the construct.

Myth, in this case, can refer to a traditional story that embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomenon of experience, and in which often the forces of nature and the soul are personified; a sacred narrative regarding a god, a hero, the origin of the world or a people, etc., while folklore signifies the tales, legends, and superstitions of a particular ethnic population. However, in everyday usage, both words can be interchangeable. On the other hand, if relying on Kuklick's perspective, myth can be taken as a traditional story accepted as history, and it may serve to explain the worldview of a people.

The material objects of the research are all the children's books mentioned above, and they also serve as the data sources. These data sources are processed to extract the data corresponding to the research's formal objects, i.e., folklore and cultural symbols. Secondary data, which consists of factual and historical accounts, are related to the works analyzed in this study. Extracting the data from the data source employs methods in literary studies, i.e., close reading and interpretation. This model is adapted from Jacqueline Rose, who started her study of children's literature through the lens of literary studies. (Rose, 1984)

DISCUSSION

This study shows the following results after completing the data processing and analysis. It starts with the process of investigating three aspects of the material objects of the research. The three aspects are cultural elements, folklore, and traditional ceremonies.

Mata di Tanah Melus (Mata in The Land of Melus)

This story begins with how enthusiastic Matara (Mata) is about many types of stories. She always remembered her grandmother's story about the solar eclipse. According to her grandmother, a lost child was once kidnapped by a giant who ate the sun because this child

peeked out the window when the sun was gone.

The story continues with Mata and his mother traveling to the island of Atambua on the Timor-Timor border. Mata accompanies his mother, who surveys the culture there to make up her story. Bad luck began when their car hit a cow in the middle of the road. Cows are considered very significant in the culture there [same as in Bali?], so Mata's mother has to give up a lot of money to pay the customary fine. Unfortunately, the spirit of the cow still haunts Matara [mystical?] So, like it or not, she has to carry out a traditional ceremony, which is said to be "a visit permit" when they come into the area. This ceremony was carried out in a sacred place far from where they lived. They have to go to Mount Lakaan, which has a very hard and steep road. Again, bad luck came to them. Not yet arrived at the ceremony venue, their car broke down, and they had to make an early apology ceremony in a large tree near the spot where they were trapped.

Next, they walked to the main ceremony place, Hol Hara Rana Hitu, a ruins of a fort at the top of Lakaan. The ceremony is led by an elder who recites mantras, slaughters chickens, and presents the brought offerings. The elder also had a dialogue with the owner of Mount Lakaan. The results did not match Mrs. Matara's expectations. The elder told Mata and his mother to go home because the owner of Lakaan did not approve of them being there. Heavy rain was pouring down quickly, which further exacerbated Ms. Matara's distrust of the ceremony, and she tried to deny it, especially after spending a lot of money. Mata and his mother were separated from the group and lost in a very strange place different from the previous Mount Lakaan.

The story in the land of Melus starts from this point, starting with Mata leaving his sleeping mother. Then, Mata walked around until the Melus finally caught her. They think that Mata is the Bunag who will kill the Melus people. Mata was taken to the hidden village of Melus. There, he had to participate in a cleansing ceremony so that he would not be killed by the people there. However, as a result, he could not get out of the village and could not meet his mother.

Meeting a child of the same age named Atok, Mata can calm down and learn more about the Melus people. He noticed the shape of the house, the way they spoke, and even the organization in the village,

such as the ceremonial leader, the person who guarded the village, and even their skills. Mata eventually learns that they are the guardians of the heritage of Mount Lakaan. They also worship all the forces of nature [romantic, fantasy, or magic?], not only the water and the wind but also the animals that guard them. They do not want their power source, Mount Lakaan, to be destroyed by evil humans like the Bunag people. Therefore, these guards always ask for the help of the rulers of nature to drive them away, such as by bringing heavy rain or hiding their village from being seen by outsiders. Despite his admiration, Mata still could not stop thinking about his mother at that moment. Feelings of guilt arose and pushed him to leave the village of Melus. He also persuaded Atok to help him even though Atok did not want to because he believed nobody could leave the village without Ema Nain's permission. However, Mata persisted, and finally, Atok helped. Against Ema Nain's words, their first misfortune was to get drowned in a rushing river due to heavy rain. Atok believes that Ema Nain sent the rain. They arrived at a butterfly village led by a giant talking human butterfly. Then they fled from the place, and they arrived at a lake full of crocodiles. Bei Nai, a half-crocodile human, also guards this place. Here, they met a crocodile hunter who Bei Nai eventually defeated.

Not long after, Mata met her mother. But his mother was not alone. He was with several scientists who wanted to find the village of Melus. Atok also assured them nobody could find Kampung Melus without Ema Nain's permission. Heavy rains also came, flushing the land until finally, the land became the sea just like thousands of years ago, leaving only the peak of Mount Lakaan, the heirloom. Atok also begs the Mother of Life (Laka Norak) to save them. They were brought to the village of Melus. There, a cleansing ceremony took place. But this time, it was different. In the past, Mata survived because she was a child. It was a bit difficult this time because Mata was not alone but with several adults. At Atok's suggestion, they ran away and finally left the village of Melus. Consequently, they cannot even go back there. Eventually, they returned to a familiar place. Mount Lakaan, where they held the apology ceremony. At that time, many people were already very panicked because Mata and his mother had been missing for seven days.

Cultural Elements

In the first series, *Mata di Tanah Melus*, cows are considered important and mythical animals in Atambua. Cows and other animals are allowed to roam without being in cages. Crashing into a cow is a serious matter from a metaphysical and social point of view. People who do that, though only unintentionally, must pay the fine and conduct an apology ceremony. Without the ceremony, the spirit of the cow will wander and interfere with the impactor's life. The ruler of nature always tells the truth. If it is not destiny, he will say no. It is not good to go against the will of nature. Melus people worship all the forces of nature. Ema Nain, Melus' leader, can cause heavy rain. The Melus Nation will never kill children and women. Outsiders who enter the territory of the Melus nation will never be able to get out of the Melus territory. The Melus drink water from Cactus.

Folklore

The elements of folklore are apparent in this story, such as a solar eclipse, which they believe is caused by a giant slowly swallowing the sun. No one can see outside during a solar eclipse because giants will kidnap them. If someone violates, they will lose consciousness for a few days. There is also what they call Hol Hara Rana Hitu Fort, built with the spirits' help. Ema Nain and Maun Iso are believed to have a strong supernatural power; they can even fly. From this description, it can be seen that this book is full of scenes and descriptions related to folklore and supernatural power. It is widely known that the folklore related to the moon persists in every culture. This definition of folklore from Rennick also involves composing and singing a song, making up and telling a story, designing and constructing an artifact, and dancing (Rennick 2001, 35). More depictions of folklore can be found in the story.

Traditional Ceremonies

In this book, there is a scene when people who come to Melus territory must conduct the traditional "visit permit" ceremony and the cleansing of "mistakes." What people need to prepare for the ceremony are: three chickens, betel leaf, and rice. The visit permit ceremony includes going around the tree, putting money in it, and putting a pinch of rice and betel leaf. This is led by an older man wearing a sarong and headband; this older man chews betel. The leader casts a spell and cuts the chickens. Then he hands the betel leaf to the one

who asked for the ceremony (Matara and her mother). There is also a soul-cleansing ceremony, which Ema Nain leads. Ema Nain said a prayer/mantra, followed by others. Ema Nain splashes water on Matara's head; it is very fragrant water. The ceremony continues with a feast: beating drums, cutting pigs, and dancing together.

Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi [Mata and the Secrets of Gapi Island]

Matara's story begins with her and her family moving to Gapi Island. His father found a new job there. The time is a good coincidence because Matara was not accepted at her favorite school, so that he can move freely. On Gapi Island, Matara is homeschooled and taught by her mother. But for religious lessons, an older man always comes to teach him religion and tells him about the Prophets, the culture of Gapi, and its surroundings.

From him, Mata increasingly understands the ins and outs of Mount Gamalama, Lake Tolire, and other areas. The first unique incident he experienced on this island was when he watched the Soya-Soya dance near the fort. At that time, the dancers were so much in a trance that they ended up with the Sultan, who suddenly fell.

It is said that they were possessed by the spirits of fort guards [supernatural beings]. The spirits do not agree if the fort is demolished to become a hotel and mall.

Matara's story continues when she meets a magical cat named Molu, who has lived for hundreds of years. He told all the stories that had happened to him; one was about how his Portuguese master later became a loyal servant of the Sultan to guard Lake Tolire. When they died, they turned into Tolire Guardian Crocodiles. He also told a myth that anyone dropping something into Lake Tolire would get a blessing. However, no one can do that except the guard.

The story continues to the times of war. It tells how foreigners invaded the area. The story of Molu rescuing Wallace, who has a fever caused by the bitter herbs there. Then, the story of how the heirloom guards (crocodiles and spiders) gave up to the foreigners.

If crocodiles guard Tolire, the former Portuguese forts are guarded by spiders that will bite anyone having bad intentions. The bite has poisoned so that the victim looks like a possessed person. This spider is the incarnation

of a dog who used to serve the Sultan.

Cultural Elements

In this book, the Sultan cast a spell to deal with the trance. The spirit of the guard of the fort wandering possesses some people. They do not like forts to be disturbed (to be destroyed). The fort is considered scary because many are in a trance and or suddenly die. The people use bitter herbs (leaves) to treat high fever. Their heirlooms [*pusaka*] must always be guarded, and nothing should be damaged.

Folklore

There is a scene in this book where Mount Gamalama erupted. Two villages were crushed by lava and became a large basin like a lake into Tolire, which two white crocodiles then guarded. Only the pure in heart can see the crocodile. If someone throws something into the lake, he or she will get lucky. It is very difficult to throw something into the lake. The two crocodile guards tolire used to be two humans who served the Sultan to guard the heirlooms. The souls of the island watchers who lost the war still live on Gapi Island until now. They live in the fort.

Traditional Ceremonies

There is a scene of "Soya-soya dance" in this book. Hundreds of men wearing yellow shirts, black pants, and yellow headbands. The leader holds a shield in his right hand, and his left hand holds a piece of bamboo with a tufted end. The drum is beaten. Everyone dances like "*Pencak Silat*," the local martial arts.

Mata dan Manusia Laut [Mata and The Sea Man]

In this book, Matara and her mother visited the islands in Southeast Sulawesi. They wanted to meet Sama's village seamen, who could dive so deep that the story of their life and culture appeared in the New York Times. There, Matara met Bambulo, a native son of the Sama people. While Matara and her mother were enjoying a party, Matara, arguing with Bambulo, finally joined Bambulo in a canoe to Sama's village.

Before Matara's story begins, this novel begins with the lives of Bambulo and Orang Sama. So many interesting stories describe how important Sanro is in the village. He is the leader of the ceremony and also the one who treats all kinds of diseases through the ceremony. It is said that Bambulo's nephew is sick and has a high fever. He was taken

to Sanro, and as soon as possible, they held a duata ceremony in the middle of the ocean and brought offerings. Before long, Bambulo's nephew stopped crying and was taken home. The next day, he was gone. Sanro's story of Orang Sama's daily life is also presented. They dive to catch fish, and often, they sail some distance to the Atoll to catch bigger and more fish. However, catching fish is taboo: they are not allowed to fish on a full moon.

That afternoon, Bambulo took Matara to the Atoll to see bigger fish. Unexpectedly, that night was a full moon night. The night the god of the sea rose to the sky, the night where the fish were not to be touched. But Bambulo realized it too late. He had also been warned by Lummu (a term for Dolphins, the guardian animals of the Sama people), but Bambulo was desperate to go to the Atoll. On the way, he was repeatedly hit by waves.

It did not stop there; he violated the taboo not to catch fish. When he caught the fish with the spear, the fish's blood did not stop flowing, and it kept bleeding and flooding the area with its blood. The sea turned red, and in an instant, a tsunami swept across the land. Hitting the Same Village. Even Bambulo and

Matara, in the middle of the sea, did not know that a tsunami was far away. All they knew was that the water suddenly receded, and they were hit by the waves and thrown far away. They finally arrived at Masalembo, an area in the Bermuda Triangle where it is said that no one can pass. They thought they were dead from getting there, but he met many people from ancient times who had not aged there. They were the people who the Sea God saved. These people [who are lost and don't age] are in charge of guarding Roro. Roro is the guardian of the ocean. He is very large, surrounding the Earth. There are only seven Roros on this Earth. Roro was disturbed by something, so he got worried and kept moving. Roro's movement can cause a powerful earthquake. Here, they calmed Roro down. After succeeding, Matara and Bambulo returned to the high seas, where the crew found them. The journey continued with several questions until they could finally return to Kampung Sama safely.

Cultural Elements

This book offers an interesting description of a traditional transportation mode named Katingting, or motorized wooden boats. The people are called "Sama". Since they were babies, Sama's

children have been put in the seawater. There is a taboo in Sama's tradition: no fishing on a full moon because it will violate the prohibition of the ruler of the universe. The Sama people catch fish with kedo-kedo, homemade fishing lines with coconut fiber, or installing FADs (piles of bamboo floating in the sea). There is Lummu, a holy being, a messenger of the god of the sea, who gives a sign of sustenance and notifies if there is danger. Lummu is Sama's word for dolphin. The Sama people leave for the Atoll at night and stay there. Lummu should not be killed because Lummu protects the Sama people. The Sama people have a unique way of treating a jellyfish bite wound. They chant a spell, rubbing their hands on the affected area.

Folklore

In Sama's culture, everyone is believed to have a twin. The Sama believe that they are sea creatures, the descendants of the sea. On a full moon night, the gods descend into the ocean, and no one can disturb them. Every full moon, the sea god ascends to the moon. That is why, according to their belief, the moon smiles. When there is an impending tsunami, the lummu jumps to the mainland, giving a signal to the land people. Butung Kukulu

also flies from the sea to the land. The sea suddenly recedes.

The Sama believe that the sea god loves humans. He invites, picks up, and saves humans who love the ocean. The Sama also believe in Roro, who caused the ocean to shake. According to their belief, Roro inhabits the sea. It sleeps at the bottom of the deepest ocean, spanning almost a quarter of the Earth's circumference. The Sama also believed a big snake was in the middle of the sea. Every time the snake moves, the storm comes.

Traditional Ceremonies

In this book, the author describes a traditional ceremony named the Duata Ceremony. It is held to cure disease. Sick people are taken to the middle of the ocean. They bring bunches of bananas, coconuts, betel leaves, colorful rice, and pillow covers used daily. The data ceremony gives offerings to the person's twin at sea. Another ceremony to invoke salvation by the lord of nature and the brethren at sea is the Karia Feast, a three-day grand celebration. In this ceremony, they sing to the god of the sea, usually after a great disaster.

Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Chicken

Like Mata'' story, Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Chicken by Daniel Pinkwater is an adventure story. Yiddish refers to a language used by Jewish people in central and eastern Europe before the Holocaust. It was originally a German dialect with words from Hebrew and several modern languages and is today spoken mainly in the US, Israel, and Russia. The Beautiful Yetta story begins when Yetta is sold by the owner to the city. Even though he had to sell the chickens, the owner felt sad when he had to part with the chickens he raised with all his heart. He finally let go of the chickens while crying and said, "Goodbye, my chickens." But on the way, the crate containing Yetta was not quite close enough so that she could run outside and say, "Now I'm free." Yetta had no idea what happened next and did not know where she was. She was lost in the crowded and confusing city of Brooklyn. She met many other animals, such as mice and pigeons, but none recognized Yetta. Then, Yetta accidentally met a small green parrot who a cat was stalking.

Yetta noticed the presence of the cat that was hiding to pounce on the little parrot and immediately chased it away. The cat ran because it saw a big Yetta ready to peck. Seeing this incident, another member of the parrot group thanked Yetta for saving his young members. Yetta tells them that he is lost. The green parrot family is amazed by Yetta's beauty and feels sorry for Yetta's loss. They then offered Yetta to stay with them, saying, "Please stay with us, beautiful chicken." The parrot family lived in high places, some even perched on power lines. Yetta joins them. The parrot family seemed to welcome the presence of Yetta because of two things: Yetta was beautiful, and she could chase away cats.

Yetta's story provides a fairly complex multicultural picture, especially regarding language use. At least three types of languages are used: American English, Spanish, and Jewish. Pinkwater even writes these three languages directly in the dialogue balloon between the characters in this story. Pinkwater also provides Hebrew letters and a way to read them in English directly in the dialogue balloon. He also provides direct translations of Hebrew and Spanish into American English. In addition, a guide to the Hebrew alphabet employed in Yiddish is also included on the final page.

Cultural Elements

In this short Yetta story, Pinkwater provides quite a lot of insight into the cultural elements, especially those tied to Jewish and Hispanic traditions. Yetta, the main character, communicates in Yiddish, introducing readers to this language and its cultural importance. The story honors and preserves Jewish heritage by including Yiddish words and expressions. The setting of Brooklyn, known for its cultural diversity, further enriches the narrative. The presence of Spanish-speaking parrots showcases the city's multicultural dynamics and highlights Hispanic cultural influences. Yetta, the central character, speaks Yiddish, which allows readers to explore the language and its cultural roots. Expressions like "Oy gevalt!" and "Gevalt!", which can mean something like "Oh, my goodness!" or "Oh no!", showcase her surprise and dismay, adding realism to her identity and emphasizing her Jewish heritage. Jewish humor and speech are sometimes dramatic or exaggerated, making it both expressive and colorful in everyday language (Mersey M, n.d.). The parrots communicate in Spanish, using phrases such as "Hola, Yetta!" and "Gracias!". Their dialogue gives authenticity to the characters and introduces readers to the richness of Hispanic culture and language.

In addition to multiculturalism, Pinkwater also provides an overview of the intersection of rural and urban cultures. It is said that Yetta originally lived in the countryside, which we can see when he introduces himself to the other animals in Brooklyn; he says, "I'm from the country." This language expression signifies that Yetta is willing to explain her cultural background to anticipate that there will be no misunderstanding when making contact with her new friends who are urban residents. This can also be interpreted as Yetta's ability to communicate interpersonally and use pragmatic strategies. When she first walked in the city of Brooklyn, Yetta seemed to experience "culture shock" because she used to walk on the grass and now has to walk on the sidewalks on the streets of the crowded city of Brooklyn.

Folklore

Referring back to Rennick's definition of folklore, folklore is: "the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people," which can include traditions commonly found in a culture, subculture, or group. These

traditions can appear as saga (tales), proverbs, and proverbs (jokes). Find some things in this Yetta story that can be categorized as folklore.

In this story, folklore describes how Yetta dances and jumps after being freed from the chicken seller. Yetta is also a symbol of freedom because she can escape from the cage that brought her to a chicken shop and then say, "I'm free."

Traditional Ceremonies

In Yetta's story, there is no typical traditional ceremony. However, it can be seen in daily rituals; for example, when the chicken owner brings his chickens from his farm to the city, he uses a pickup truck with several chicken coops (crates) on the truck's box. In addition, another ritual described here is symbolized by the habit of Yetta's new friend, the parrot family, who likes to occupy high places to perch. They asked Yetta to join their family and imitate their ritual of perching in a high place. Yetta finally agreed.

Discussion

Given the population density on the Java island and the distribution of marketing for children's books in Indonesia, it can be assumed that the readers of Okky Madasari's works are mostly from areas on the island of Java. However, the story told in the three books takes place in areas outside Java, namely East Nusa Tenggara, Ternate, and Southeast Sulawesi. Therefore, the elements of folklore can help children to get to know more about cultures from other regions.

In addition, they will have fun encountering unique things they did not know before. Children usually see strange and new things as fun, provoking them to learn more.

In addition to culture, children who read these works will also learn history, especially in Mata and the Secrets of Gapi Island. Most of the content of this book is about history, which is sometimes told monotonously from the point of view of a cat named Molu. The cat tells the monologue at length, and this part seems the most tiring for the reader. The other two series have more cultural depictions and seem more interesting. Apart from these things, readers seem to be taught to pay more attention to nature and are also given some kind of motivation to take steps to conserve nature.

The message in this work is conveyed subtly through

symbols. For example, when the author conveys that we must not kill crocodiles or exploit nature on a large scale, the message is conveyed indirectly, when it is told that a crocodile hunter has come. There is the character of Bei Nai, a guard. Crocodile. In that section, no explicit sentence states that killing crocodiles is not allowed. Still, a very charismatic charge guard appears, which suggests that crocodiles occupy a very important role. Although this Bei Nai character can be said to be only a fictional character, this is not entirely the case because the author of a mythical story in the area took this character. So, in this section, the message is conveyed subtly and not patronizingly, with the media depicting figures taken from local myths. Then, we were also told that we should not swim on the full moon because the moon goddess and the sea goddess would be angry.

In Pinkwater's *Beautiful Yetta: The Yiddish Kitchen*, cultural influences, modern folklore, and messages of community and acceptance create a compelling story that celebrates friendship and diversity. Its use of different languages, the hero's adventure, and the portrayal of community solidarity add depth and charm to the narrative. This story also provides an overview of the intersection of rural and urban cultures. As previously discussed, the fact that Yetta originally lived in the countryside and her experience of "culture shock" when she first walked into the city of Brooklyn suggests the differences between rural and urban life. Yetta's characterization and behavior can also be seen as a symbol of freedom, as she escapes from the cage that brought her to a chicken shop and declares, "I'm free". This act of liberation and her subsequent adventures can be seen as a metaphor for pursuing freedom and self-determination.

CONCLUSION

Okky Madasari and Daniel Pinkwater describe cultural intersections, whether mutual or antagonistic. In Madasari's works, the intersections are more hostile, and at the end of the story, they require separation or returning to their home culture. On the contrary, in Pinkwater's work, the intersection looks friendlier. At the end of the story, the characters that experienced culture shock at the beginning blend in with the new culture. Then, the character stays permanent in her new culture at the end. In other words, there is no

"coming-home scene" in Yetta's story. It can be seen as unusual in children's literature, since the coming home scene is usually seen as a resolution in most children's books.

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Ideology, Values and Norms in Hip-hop Community Wijilan Yogyakarta: An Ethnographic Study

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the cultural adaptation of American hip-hop in Wijilan, Yogyakarta, focusing on the dynamics of hybridity between global and local cultures. Hip-hop, originally rooted in the Bronx during the 1970s, has become a global cultural force that merges with various traditions worldwide. In Wijilan, the hip-hop community has blended the individualistic values of American hip-hop with the Javanese collective ethos of *gotong royong*. This fusion results in unique artistic expressions. Using ethnographic methods, this study reveals hip-hop's role as an ideology through identity formation, resistance, cultural expression, and social commentary within communities by observing practices, exploring identity, highlighting resistance, interpreting symbols, and assessing impact. Events, like Soringin Hip-hop Festival, highlight the role of hip-hop as a platform for cultural exchange and social commentary, showcasing a blend of music, graffiti, and dance that embodies both local and global influences. The study concludes that the cultural hybridity in Wijilan's hip-hop community fosters a new, dynamic identity that maintains traditional values while embracing contemporary, global trends, contributing to both cultural preservation and innovation.

Keywords: *cultural hybridity; hip-hop community; ideology; norms; values; wijilan yogyakarta*

INTRODUCTION

Hip-hop culture, born in the Bronx, New York in the 1970s, has evolved into a global phenomenon that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. Its four main elements - MCing (rapping), DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti - have become a means of self-expression for marginalized youth, reflecting the values of individuality, resistance, and creativity (Chang, 2005).

The spread of hip-hop around the world was influenced by globalization, mass media, and diaspora. In the 1980s and 1990s, media such as MTV and digital music distribution accelerated hip-hop's adoption in various countries. Its flexibility in accommodating local narratives allowed for the creation of unique versions across cultures (Alim, 2009).

In Indonesia, hip-hop became known in the late 1990s through the media and independent music communities. Yogyakarta, as a center of art and culture, became one of the cities that responded quickly to this phenomenon. In Wijilan, hip-hop was enthusiastically received by the younger generation who adapted it to the local context, harmonizing hip-hop values such as freedom of expression and struggle against injustice with the local wisdom of Javanese culture.

Yogyakarta is known as a city of arts and culture with strong Javanese traditions. The region is a space where tradition and modernity meet, making it a fertile ground for cultural hybridity. Wijilan, one of the historical neighborhoods in Yogyakarta, is a clear example of how global culture such as hip-hop is integrated into the local context.

The hip-hop community in Wijilan began to grow in the early 2000s. They were inspired by the hip-hop music, fashion, and movement they saw in the international media. The group started to create creative spaces such as rap battle events, breakdance performances, and graffiti in the corners of the city. Hip-hop became a medium to convey local issues while building solidarity among its members.

The hybridity of hip-hop culture in Wijilan occurs through the process of adapting the value of individualism from American hip-hop with the Javanese value of collectives. The hip-hop community in Wijilan adopts a collective work format in every activity, such as organizing events or creating artwork, reflecting a strong spirit of *gotong royong*

(Raditya, 2014). The rap songs they create raise local issues such as community welfare, education, and cultural preservation, delivered in Javanese or mixed with Indonesian. International hip-hop clothing styles are combined with traditional Javanese elements, such as the use of batik cloth in their clothing designs.

Elements of breakdancing and graffiti are often integrated with traditional performing arts such as *gamelan* or *wayang kulit*, creating a unique fusion. This process of hybridity results in a new local identity, where hip-hop in Wijilan becomes a medium to create a local identity that is modern but still rooted in Javanese tradition.

Through rap lyrics and graffiti, this community conveys social messages that are relevant to the surrounding community. Hip-hop art is integrated with local traditions, creating a space where young and old generations can interact, and encouraging the development of a creative economy through artworks such as murals and hip-hop performances that are now part of the cultural tourism attraction in Yogyakarta.

Cultural hybridity in the hip-hop community in Wijilan shows that cultural adaptation can produce unique forms of creative expression, enrich local culture, and strengthen community identity. Hip-hop in Wijilan is not just an adoption of global culture, but a transformation that shows the richness of local cultural adaptations in the midst of globalization (Laksono et al., 2018). This research aims to explore how American hip-hop culture is adapted by the hip-hop community in Wijilan, analyze the dynamics of hybridity between global and local cultures, and identify the results of this hybridity process on the local community and culture.

Local Hip Hop, from a researcher's perspective, has never been as vibrant as it has been in the past five years. Of course, many factors have led to this. Most might point to Rich Brian's skyrocketing popularity in the US and European music scene as the main reason why local hip-hop feels interesting. Others are more excited about the new generation of MCs and beatmakers who have emerged with phenomenal works. These young talents are not afraid to take the aesthetic and technical aspects of local rap music and lyrics to the next level. Some think that the hip-hop scene has become

interesting, thanks to the success of the genre's diaspora in reaching remote areas of Indonesia supported by information technology. You can find hip-hop in areas that you never imagined before, from Jakarta, Bandung, the outskirts of Lake Toba, Cirebon, Purwokerto, Banjarmasin, Flores, Ternate, and remote Papua.

Every local hip-hop fan should turn their attention to one of the hottest spots: Wijilan, Yogyakarta. Even the incident with the police that happened earlier this month will not stop hip-hop activists from Wijilan. Before I go any further, I need to emphasize that Yogyakarta successfully earned its own place in the local hip-hop scene two decades ago. In the early days of hip hop in Indonesia, Yogyakarta played an equally important role as other cities such as Medan, Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. The legendary hip hop unit G-Tribe was included in the compilation album *Pesta Rap Vol.1* when it was released in 1993 with lyrics entirely in Javanese. However, it cannot be denied that the most interesting period of hip hop in Yogyakarta is the past five years. To be precise, a collective called Hellhouse Indo was born in the middle of a weekly night hangout on a street in the heart of Yogyakarta called Wijilan. Hellhouse Indo began with the collective's intention to create a shared studio, given the difficulty of access for them to record independently. Over time, the hangout became a medium for them to release and distribute albums. *Hellhouse Indo* has released albums *Begundal Clan*, *D.P.M.B*, and the veteran debut *Boyz Got No Brain* late last year. However, they basically promote local material that is not always released from their own community. For example, Bacil Kill's debut album *ANTIXUNIX* and local hardcore unit Serigala Malam's single.

Hellhouse Indo is more than just a record label. This community is a medium for young people who love hip-hop to carry out activities with local residents. Starting from organizing rap and graffiti events or anything that intersects with their activities as a group of residents in one territory, from "Watchout Dab", and "Angkringan Hip Hop" to "Beat Camp". However, the significant points to summarize the reason, "what is the importance of Wijilan?", then there are three most important things for all local hip hop activists to pay more attention to the young

people who keep this subculture fire burning in Yogyakarta.

METHODOLOGY

Fishkin (2005) emphasizes the importance of understanding American culture as a transnational entity, meaning that it is not tied to just one geographical location but spreads and transforms through cross-cultural interactions. In the context of hip-hop, this approach helps to understand how American hip-hop culture changes when it is adapted to local cultures, such as in Wijilan. Using this approach, this research explores how elements of American hip-hop, such as rap, breakdancing, and graffiti, are received and interpreted through the lens of Javanese culture, which is rich in collective values.

Ideology is defined as a system of representations, beliefs, and ideas that serve to maintain and reproduce the social order (Castells, 2013). Castells argues that ideology functions as a mechanism of domination, shaping perceptions and masking the underlying power dynamics of society. In the urban context, this often involves the legitimization of spatial organization and urban development practices that reflect and reinforce the interests of dominant social groups. By framing these practices as natural or inevitable, ideology obscures the inequalities and contradictions inherent in the urban system. This expression reveals how hip-hop is not merely a form of entertainment but has become a value system that influences followers' attitudes, behaviors, and worldviews. This transformation reflects the global nature of hip-hop as a tool for self-expression and social resistance, while also showing how the Wijilan community has localized these principles to build a unique cultural identity.

Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity (2015) helps explain the merging of American and Javanese cultures in Wijilan's hip-hop community, creating a *"third space"* where unique cultural expressions form. This aligns with Sven Ove Hansson's *The Structure of Values and Norms* (2001), which highlights how values and norms can be both static and dynamic, playing a role in cultural integration. When cultures interact, their values and norms blend and adapt, forming new systems through processes like assimilation and cross-cultural exchange, which reshape social interactions and cultural identities. For example, rap lyrics in Javanese

and the use of hip-hop elements in hip-hop performances show how global and local cultures influence each other and make hip-hop a value ideology in everyday life. To understand this hybridity process, an ethnographic method was used based on Spradley's (2016) ethnographic interview approach. This approach allows researchers to explore cultural meanings through in-depth interviews with members of the hip-hop community in Wijilan.

DISCUSSION

This research began on Saturday, February 3, 2024, with the researcher starting observations in the Wijilan area, Yogyakarta. As an initial step, the researcher captured images of the surrounding area and observed the dynamics that were taking place there. The purpose of this observation was to gain a general understanding of the atmosphere in Wijilan, which is known as the center of local hip-hop community activities. The researcher did not only observe the physical area but also sought to understand the social interactions that occurred there.

On the same day, the researcher met one of the community members who then introduced the researcher to several other individuals, including rappers who were frequently active in the Wijilan area. The researcher's main informant, Rezky, who works as a barista at a local café, played a key role in opening connections with the community members. Through this introduction, the researcher began to interact more with the community members and delve into their daily lives and routines.

The researcher did not conduct observations every day but arranged visits approximately four to five times a week. The researcher tended to visit on weekends or holidays such as Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, which are times when the community's activities were more intense. However, the researcher realized that not all community members gathered on every occasion. Despite this, the researcher made an effort to consistently be present in Wijilan to observe the various activities and interactions that occurred there.

From the researcher's view, socially, the Wijilan community could be categorized as lower middle-class, with the majority working as traders, craftsmen, or small business owners. As an area that is part of the *Kraton* Yogyakarta territory, Wijilan holds a close connection with traditional Javanese values and

culture. These values, including the Islamic teachings that have developed in this area, greatly influence the local community's worldview regarding outside cultures, including the hip-hop culture brought by this community. Several informants told the researcher that before the existence of Hellhouse Indo, the people around Wijilan strongly upheld the Javanese and Eastern values they had inherited since childhood. These values were deeply influenced by the Islamic teachings that were ingrained in their daily lives. The presence of this community, bringing hip-hop culture from the outside, sparked various reactions, especially among those who held conservative views about culture and morality.

Hip-hop as an Ideology

A young community figure, Muh. Bima Sakti Nur (Personal communication, February 18, 2024) describes the role of hip-hop as "Hip-hop sudah menjadi ideologi dalam keseharian [Hip-hop has become an ideology in daily life]. Nur's perspective also highlights hip-hop as a vehicle for resistance, particularly against social, economic, and political pressures that often marginalize young people. Since its inception, hip-hop has

provided a platform for voicing dissent, and in Wijilan, it plays a similar role in challenging dominant narratives and structures. Through lyrics that speak to issues like inequality, oppression, and social justice, hip-hop offers the youth a means to express their discontent and resist cultural and systemic limitations. This "ideology in daily life" is not passive but is woven into active expressions of self-identity and community solidarity, empowering individuals to reshape their realities and assert their voices against broader social constraints.

Furthermore, the daily integration of hip-hop in Wijilan showcases its role in community building and informal education. Hip-hop culture fosters spaces where young people feel accepted, understood, and motivated to pursue their creative and intellectual passions. In these spaces, they develop critical skills, from artistry in graffiti or breakdancing to technical know-how in music production. This daily practice of hip-hop, as Nur describes, serves as an inclusive ideology, one that encourages continuous learning, emotional resilience, and a sense of belonging. Hip-hop's ideals of

empowerment and solidarity become embedded in everyday routines, illustrating how hip-hop is not only an art form but also an enduring influence that shapes the way the younger generation in Wijilan interacts with the world. The integration of hip-hop into daily practices demonstrates its transformative potential in shaping identity and social interactions (Fishkin, 2005). What began as a global cultural import has now rooted itself deeply in local contexts, resonating with young individuals and redefining their everyday experiences.

The infusion of hip-hop into daily practices also reflects a deeper cultural process, where global individualistic tendencies blend with Javanese communal values like *gotong royong*. This fusion is evident in community events that bring people together, such as rap battles or breakdancing showcases that emphasize cooperation and mutual support over competition.

Javanese culture, with its rich traditions in music, dance, and storytelling, provides a unique backdrop for the adaptation of global hip-hop. Traditional Javanese music, such as gamelan, emphasizes rhythm and communal participation, mirroring hip-hop's focus on beats and collective expression. This blending allows Javanese artists to maintain their cultural identity while engaging with a global movement, creating a distinctive fusion that resonates with both local and international audiences.

Both Javanese culture and hip-hop share themes of social justice and resistance. Javanese history is marked by struggles against colonialism and oppression, paralleling the narratives found in hip-hop that critique systemic injustices. Artists in Java often use hip-hop to address local issues such as poverty, corruption, and social inequality, drawing connections to the broader global hip-hop movement. The incorporation of the Javanese language and idioms into lyrics further enriches this cultural expression, allowing for a deeper connection with local audiences while remaining accessible to a wider audience.

The spirit of community and collaboration is deeply rooted in both Javanese culture and hip-hop. Traditional performances often involve collective participation, which is mirrored in hip-hop through collaborations among artists and local communities. Javanese hip-hop artists are known for their innovative

approaches, blending traditional elements with contemporary styles to create a distinct sound. This reciprocal relationship not only showcases how local cultures can reinterpret global influences but also highlights the importance of cultural exchange in the modern music landscape, enriching both Javanese culture and global hip-hop.

Building on this transformative role, among young people in Wijilan, hip-hop has become more than just entertainment; it has become "mendarah daging" or deeply ingrained in their identity, as expressed by Ravitto Adji Setyoko, another member of the community (personal communication, March 10, 2024). Hip-hop plays an important role as a tool for resisting the social, economic, and political pressures they face. Since its inception, hip-hop has been a voice for marginalized communities to express dissatisfaction with injustice. For the youth in Wijilan, hip-hop also serves as a means of resisting dominant narratives that restrict them, both locally and nationally. Through rap lyrics that address issues of marginalization and inequality, they not only depict their living conditions but also present a clear and organized form of resistance.

Also, hip-hop as an ideology plays a critical role in how these young individuals navigate their social environments, particularly within the constraints of local and global inequalities. As a cultural product of marginalized communities, hip-hop provides a platform for articulating personal and collective struggles, helping youth in Wijilan to challenge societal norms and the pressures imposed by conventional expectations. The ideologies embedded in hip-hop music, dance, fashion, and language offer alternative modes of resistance to the hegemonic forces that often marginalize or silence their voices. Hip-hop, thus, becomes a tool for asserting agency, constructing identity, and rejecting societal marginalization, allowing young people to find solidarity within a global movement that resonates with their lived experiences. This interplay is vividly reflected in their creative works, where Javanese language and traditional motifs intertwine with global hip-hop aesthetics, fostering a profound sense of belonging while simultaneously embracing a global cultural movement (Bhabha, 2015).

The amalgamation of hip-hop and Javanese artistic

traditions underscores this profound integration. Traditional motifs and symbols are revitalized in graffiti art and fashion, as batik patterns integrate with streetwear, illustrating a visual conversation between history and contemporary culture. This innovative amalgamation not only strengthens cultural continuity but also reinterprets the concepts of modernity and Javanese identity. It embodies Bhabha's notion of the 'third space', wherein components of diverse cultures amalgamate to create novel, hybrid identities that incorporate aspects of both yet are exclusively affiliated with neither.

Furthermore, hip-hop's influence on self-expression affects how youth in Wijilan view their community and their position within it. This elevates hip-hop from mere entertainment to a form of activism, serving simultaneously as a mirror of reality and a driver of change. By incorporating local narratives into their songs, dance performances, and public art, the youth both entertain and educate while fostering dialogue. This cultural movement cultivates a sense of belonging intricately linked to local values while simultaneously embracing and

contributing to the global progression of hip-hop culture.

Hip-hop serves as a universal expression of struggle, emerging as a response to social, economic, and political challenges faced by marginalized communities worldwide. Artists use the genre to articulate their experiences with oppression, discrimination, and inequality, creating a global connection among hip-hop communities. This cultural movement not only allows for the reclamation of identity but also acts as a form of resistance against dominant narratives. Through powerful social commentary, hip-hop addresses pressing issues such as poverty, violence, and racism, resonating with listeners who may be experiencing these challenges firsthand.

Moreover, hip-hop empowers individuals and encourages activism, with many artists collaborating with community organizations to mobilize support for various causes. The genre's adaptability allows it to resonate across diverse cultural contexts, while still maintaining a consistent goal of addressing social injustice. By fostering a sense of community among those who share similar struggles, hip-hop creates networks of support

that amplify voices and messages, ultimately serving as a vehicle for social change and empowerment, as described by Daru Isnawan (personal communication, March 30, 2024), "Bangun tidur dengerin Hip-hop, dan jadi mood booster kalau mau kerja [I wake up listening to Hip-hop, and it is a mood booster when I want to work]". His words highlight the psychological significance of hip-hop as a source of energy and emotional regulation. This ritualistic interaction illustrates how hip-hop in Wijilan is not merely consumed but actively integrated into personal routines, underscoring its role as a cultural and emotional anchor that deeply influences daily life (Spradley, 2016). Taking this immersion, a step further, Alexander Sinaga notes the pervasive nature of hip-hop, "Mau ngapa-ngapain pasti ada hubungannya dengan hip-hop [Anything I do must have something to do with hip-hop]". This sentiment underscores the holistic adoption of hip-hop as a lifestyle, extending its reach into fashion, language, and behavior.

Adding another dimension, M. Rifqi Haikal R. (23) points out how local hip-hop has heightened his awareness of Jogja's environment, "Setelah sering menikmati karya karya mereka saya jadi lebih aware terhadap lingkungan Jogja [After enjoying their works, I became more aware of Jogja's environment]. This observation aligns with the global trend of localized hip-hop becoming a platform for addressing and reflecting on community-specific issues. In Jogja, hip-hop's lyrical narratives often delve into urbanization, environmental challenges, and social inequality, resonating deeply with local audiences and fostering collective awareness. This transformative aspect positions hip-hop as not just a cultural expression but a catalyst for social change (Alim, 2009). Through these narratives, hip-hop in Wijilan continues to evolve as a medium that bridges personal identity and community consciousness.

The Hallmark of Wijilan Hip-hop

Wijilan, a district in Yogyakarta renowned for its profound Javanese cultural traditions, has emerged as an unforeseen center for hip-hop culture. Notwithstanding Yogyakarta's abundant cultural heritage, the local youth have identified with the global art form of hip-hop. The introduction of hip-hop in Wijilan was enabled by globalization, digital accessibility, and an increasing inclination among Indonesian youth to articulate

their frustrations and aspirations through music and art. This chapter examines the localization of hip-hop culture in Wijilan and its interaction with Javanese traditions, societal norms, and local political issues.

Hip-hop emerged in Indonesia in the late 1990s, after the democratization of media following the collapse of Suharto's regime in 1998. During this period, the nation experienced an increase in youth movements and a transformation in cultural receptivity, facilitating the proliferation of foreign music genres, such as hip-hop (Heryanto, 2008). In Yogyakarta, a longstanding hub for the arts, hip-hop began to flourish in the early 2000s. The Wijilan district, recognized for its closeness to the Sultan's palace and traditional arts, progressively evolved into a convergence point for local artists, including hip-hop aficionados. This locale served as an ideal setting for the amalgamation of contemporary global art forms, such as hip-hop, with Javanese cultural elements.

The proliferation of hip-hop in Wijilan is primarily ascribed to local artists and collectives who adopted the genre as both a mode of entertainment and a vehicle for addressing socio-political concerns. Organizations such as the Jogja Hip-Hop Foundation (JHF) significantly contributed to the proliferation of hip-hop in Yogyakarta. Established in 2003, JHF gained recognition for integrating Javanese poetry with contemporary rap rhythms, exemplifying a blend of local and global influences (Garda, 2011). The fusion of Javanese traditions with hip-hop has produced a distinctive sound and aesthetic that sets Wijilan's hip-hop scene apart from other areas in Indonesia.

In Wijilan, hip-hop functions as a medium for the youth to articulate their concerns regarding poverty, unemployment, corruption, and the difficulties of modernization. Numerous artists incorporate Bahasa Indonesia or Javanese dialects in their lyrics, rendering their music accessible to the local populace while preserving the global essence of hip-hop (Barendregt, 2014). This local adaptation guarantees that the music resonates with the community while enabling artists to preserve a unique cultural identity. The incorporation of local languages and traditional Javanese poetic forms, referred to as *tembang*, has imparted a

distinctive character to Wijilan's hip-hop scene.

Notwithstanding the considerable impact of American hip-hop, Wijilan's artists have innovatively integrated local elements into their music. Traditional Javanese instruments, such as the gamelan, have been integrated with contemporary rhythms, resulting in a sound that is both innovative and culturally rooted (Yampolsky, 2010). This amalgamation serves not merely as an artistic decision but also as a means of cultural preservation, guaranteeing that Javanese traditions retain their significance for the younger generation. Moreover, local dances, such as *kuda lumping*, are occasionally integrated into hip-hop performances, thereby strengthening the connection between hip-hop and traditional culture.

Similar to the inception of hip-hop in the United States, Wijilan's hip-hop scene mirrors the social and political issues of its community. The economic inequality, corruption, and challenges related to local governance are recurring motifs in the lyrics of Wijilan's rappers. These artists utilize their music to confront the status quo, highlighting local injustices and motivating youth to participate in activism.

Thus, hip-hop in Wijilan serves as both an artistic medium and an instrument for social transformation (Weintraub, 2010).

Noval Satria Mahendra (Personal communication, February 2, 2024) underscores the distinctiveness of Wijilan's hip-hop culture by stating, "Hip-hop Jogja bercampur dengan kearifan lokal menjadi ciri khas [Jogja's hip-hop mixed with local wisdom characterizes the city]. This observation highlights how hip-hop in Wijilan has developed a unique character through a process of blending global influences with local traditions. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of cultural hybridity as discussed by Bhabha (2015), where two or more cultural systems interact and fuse to form a new, hybrid cultural identity. In the case of Wijilan, this hybridity is not merely an imitation of global hip-hop trends but a transformation that integrates the values, narratives, and aesthetics of Javanese culture. This integration is vividly visible in various forms of creative expression, including rap lyrics that explore local issues, graffiti that incorporates traditional Javanese motifs, and performances that often blend hip-hop dance styles with

elements of traditional art forms.

For example, "Song of Sabdatama" by Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF) shows the local that is a hybrid with the global:

> We are from Jogja / The heart of Java / Our rhyme is mantra / Flows down like lava / We are from Jogja / The heart of Java / Our culture is weapon / Yeah this song of Sabdatama

"Song of Sabdatama" symbolizes the fusion of local and global cultures, as they bring the essence of Javanese heritage into the world of hip-hop. By identifying themselves as "from Jogja, the heart of Java", JHF emphasizes their connection to a rich cultural legacy. Their reference to "mantra" suggests that their rhymes carry spiritual depth, blending traditional Javanese beliefs with modern musical elements to create a unique cultural expression that flows naturally, like lava from Mount Merapi.

Through the phrase "Our culture is a weapon," JHF conveys a message of cultural resilience and empowerment. By framing their music as a tool for preserving and asserting Javanese identity, they acknowledge the power of cultural heritage to resist global homogenization. This metaphorical "weapon" helps them stand against external pressures, using music to champion and protect their cultural values within a modern context.

Ultimately, 'Sabdatama' represents JHF's commitment to maintaining authenticity while engaging with global music. By infusing hip-hop with Javanese traditions, they create a hybrid style that not only preserves local culture but also makes it accessible worldwide. This approach allows JHF to position themselves as cultural ambassadors, showcasing Javanese heritage in a way that remains true to its roots while adapting to the modern music landscape.

The tension between adopting American cultural forms and retaining local identity is an ongoing theme in the Wijilan Hip-hop Community, where young artists constantly navigate the intersection of global influence and local tradition. Noval Satria Mahendra's insight underscores this delicate balance, as he observes the melding of Jogja's local wisdom with the global influence of hip-hop. This synthesis is not just a stylistic choice but a conscious political act, one that asserts local identity while embracing a broader, globally recognized form of

artistic resistance. The local wisdom embedded in their work allows the community to reclaim hip-hop as a tool for cultural empowerment rather than cultural domination.

Figure 1. Jogja Hip-hop Foundation (JHF) performances at Soringin Hip-hop Festival

JHF is a music and arts community based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, that focuses on the development and promotion of hip-hop music with a local cultural twist. The community is known for blending traditional hip-hop elements with Indonesian style and vibes while promoting content that addresses social, cultural, and political issues through powerful and bold lyrics. JHF often features local rappers, producers, and musicians who are inspired by local culture and Indonesia's history and is committed to the growth of the independent music industry in Indonesia. One of JHF's goals is to provide a space for young hip-hop artists to express

themselves and collaborate while using hip-hop as a platform to voice social injustices and important issues. JHF is also known for events and performances that often involve collaborations between rappers, DJs, and producers, supporting works of art that carry strong social messages. They have become one of the pioneers of local-themed hip-hop, now gaining wider recognition in the Indonesian music scene.

On their Instagram account, @hiphopsoringin gives credit and a caption to JHF, as follows

Para pionir rap jawa mengejawantah dalam rupa super group yang kita kenal sebagai Jogja Hip-hop Foundatioon. Aura sangar itu bukan hanya karena kemegahan sound dan tata panggung. Namun juga keluar dari akumulasi 'ngelmu iku kalakone kanthi laku' Praktik cara dan gaya hidup hiphop berkompromi dengan adab kejawaan yang banyak mengolah rasa. Dialektika inilah yang patut kita amini sebagai keberhasilan penetrasi Rap Jawa pada publik, mendefiniskkan 'cool' tanpa menelanjangi bahasa ibu kita {Javanese rap pioneers have materialized into the super group we know as Jogja Hip-Hop Foundation. The fierce aura comes not only from the grandeur of the sound and

stage setup, but also from the accumulation of 'ngelmu iku kalakone kanthi laku [knowledge is gained through action]'. The practice of hip-hop style and lifestyle has found a compromise with Javanese values that deeply engage emotions. This dialectic is what we should recognize as the success of Javanese Rap's penetration into the public, defining 'cool' without stripping away our mother tongue}.

JHF represents a groundbreaking fusion of hip-hop culture and Javanese tradition, proving that modern musical expressions can coexist harmoniously with deep-rooted cultural values. Unlike conventional hip-hop, which often draws from Western influences, JHF has carved out a unique space where Javanese philosophy, language, and artistic sensibilities shape their identity. The phrase "ngelmu iku kalakone kanthi laku [knowledge is gained through action]" reflects their artistic journey—one that is not merely about imitation but about living and embodying the spirit of both hip-hop and Javanese wisdom. This philosophy underscores their authenticity, as they don't just adopt hip-hop as a superficial trend but as a meaningful practice deeply connected to their cultural identity.

One of the most compelling aspects of JHF's music is its ability to blend the intensity of hip-hop's beats and stage presence with the emotional depth of Javanese expression. Hip-hop, traditionally a genre associated with resistance and social commentary, finds a natural counterpart in Javanese poetic traditions such as *macapat* and *tembang,* which have long been used to convey philosophical reflections and social messages. By integrating these elements, JHF transforms their performances into more than just entertainment; they become a powerful platform for storytelling, cultural preservation, and emotional engagement. Their ability to navigate between these two worlds—between the global appeal of hip-hop and the nuanced aesthetics of Javanese art—demonstrates a dialectical success where modern and traditional identities reinforce, rather than diminish, one another.

What makes Javanese rap particularly significant is its ability to redefine what is considered 'cool' without abandoning its linguistic and cultural roots. In a world where globalization often pressures local cultures to conform to dominant trends, JHF has managed to popularize the Javanese language in a way that

feels contemporary and dynamic. They prove that embracing one's heritage does not mean being outdated or irrelevant; rather, it is a way to assert identity in a rapidly changing world. This success in maintaining authenticity while reaching a wide audience shows that cultural expression does not have to be a choice between tradition and modernity—JHF's music exemplifies how both can thrive together, creating a form of hip-hop that is distinctly Javanese yet universally resonant.

The unique nature of Wijilan's hip-hop is further defined by its role in addressing social issues. According to Chang (2005), hip-hop is a cultural movement that reflects and responds to social realities. It serves as a medium to break boundaries and promote change, making it more than just entertainment, but also a tool for social transformation. Muh. Bima Sakti Nur (Personal communication, February 10, 2024) adds that "Lirik-lirik lagu Hip-hop mencerminkan isu-isu sosial [Hip-hop lyrics reflect social issues]. In Wijilan, hip-hop lyrics tackle themes such as inequality, environmental degradation, and youth empowerment. This reflects the transformative power of hip-hop as a voice for the voiceless, a

characteristic observed globally (Chang, 2005; Raditya, 2014).

An example is a song from JHF called "Jogja Ora Didol". The song is a powerful example of the group's unique style, blending traditional Indonesian elements with hip-hop culture. The title itself translates to "Jogja is Not for Sale", with 'Jogja' referring to Yogyakarta, a city that holds deep cultural and historical significance in Indonesia. The song is a declaration of resistance against the commercialization and exploitation of the city's cultural heritage. Through the lyrics, JHF expresses a sense of pride in their hometown, emphasizing that the cultural richness and identity of Yogyakarta should not be reduced to a commodity for profit. It critiques the rapid commercialization of the city, which is often seen in the growing influence of tourism and outside investments that may threaten local traditions and values. "Jogja Ora Didol" not only serves as a protest song but also as a celebration of Yogyakarta's unique culture and its people's resilience. The track combines socially conscious rap with traditional Javanese sounds and references, illustrating how JHF blends modern hip-hop with local

culture to create a powerful, authentic message. This song, like many others by JHF, is both a call to action and an affirmation of cultural pride.

> Jogja ora didol! / Ini kotaku, kotamu, kota kita / Jogja ora didol! / Rumah bersama untuk kita semua / Jogja ora didol! / Ini kotaku, kotamu, kota kita / Jogja ora didol! / Jogja istimewa, tetaplah sederhana

The song reflects a form of local cultural resistance against modernization and commercialization that threatens the traditional values of Yogyakarta. In cultural studies, this resistance serves as a critique of policies that could alter the cultural identity and social values of the local community. The main lyric, "Jogja Ora Didol", reinforces the principle that this city is not a commodity to be bought or sold, but a communal home that possesses valuable local cultural heritage worthy of preservation. This aligns with resistance theory, where hip-hop music serves as a tool for challenging global economic dominance (Rose, 1994).

Hip-hop is often a medium for voicing social criticism because of its expressive nature and freedom from mainstream norms. In the lyrics of "Jogja Ora Didol", JHF not only conveys a message but also strengthens local identity through a distinct linguistic and musical style. They assert "Jogja Ora Didol" as a collective stance of the community against the threat of cultural capitalization. This critique targets the phenomenon of urban spatial changes driven by large-scale investments, such as the construction of malls and luxury hotels, which often come at the expense of public spaces and local cultural identity (Muller, 2011).

The repetition of the phrase "Ini kotaku, kotamu, kota kita" emphasizes the importance of collective ownership and social responsibility toward the city. Through these lyrics, JHF reminds listeners that Yogyakarta is a shared space, with a strong community value, that should not be turned into an investment tool that harms the local population. This principle demonstrates the awareness of local hip-hop culture regarding the importance of solidarity in preserving cultural heritage from external intervention. This collective approach aligns with critical cultural theory, where shared spaces are seen as symbols of collective identity that must be protected (Harvey, 2012).

The message embedded in "Jogja Ora Didol" shows how local elements, such as language and communal values, can serve as tools for social critique within hip-hop. JHF portrays Yogyakarta as "special" due to its simplicity and social openness. By emphasizing that Jogja should remain simple, they critique developments that promote consumerist and individualistic culture, which often contradict local values. This demonstrates resistance to cultural capitalism that overlooks the existing social and cultural conditions of the community (Bennett, 2000).

Therefore, "Jogja Ora Didol" can be seen as a manifestation of cultural resistance through local hip-hop, rejecting cultural homogenization and preserving local uniqueness. In the context of pop culture, hip-hop music often combines traditional elements with modern expressions to voice the aspirations of the people. Through these lyrics, JHF effectively positions itself as a critical voice against socioeconomic changes that threaten local identity and cultural values.

Hip-hop in this context is not just entertainment or artistic expression; it serves as a platform for voicing concerns about local challenges and aspirations. Lyrics often explore themes of urbanization, social inequality, environmental preservation, and the struggles of everyday life in Yogyakarta. These narratives resonate with the local community, reflecting their lived experiences and fostering a sense of collective identity. For instance, graffiti, which is a prominent element of Wijilan's hip-hop culture, not only beautifies public spaces but also serves as a visual commentary on societal issues. Performances and events organized by the community often aim to raise awareness and spark conversations around these themes, demonstrating how hip-hop can function as a medium of activism and social engagement.

By merging global hip-hop elements with Javanese cultural wisdom, Wijilan's hip-hop creates a powerful narrative that bridges individual expression and community consciousness. The cultural hybridity form not only enhances the cultural richness of the local community but also exemplifies how global cultural trends can be localized in meaningful and innovative ways. Through this process, Wijilan's hip-hop not only preserves the essence of Javanese values but also redefines them within a contemporary global framework,

creating a dynamic and evolving cultural identity that continues to inspire its practitioners and audience alike.

Cultural hybridity in hip-hop is intricately connected to the phenomenon of American hip-hop hegemony, particularly in communities like Yogyakarta, Indonesia. As hip-hop culture has spread globally, it has not only been adopted but also adapted by local communities, leading to the formation of unique norms and values that reflect their cultural contexts.

In Yogyakarta, the influence of American hip-hop is evident in the music, fashion, and language adopted by local artists and fans. However, rather than merely replicating American styles, Yogyakarta's hip-hop community has infused local cultural elements, creating a hybrid form that resonates with their identity. This blending allows for the expression of local issues, traditions, and experiences, thereby establishing a distinct cultural narrative that challenges the dominance of American hip-hop.

The hegemony of American hip-hop often sets the standards for what is considered "authentic" or "mainstream" within the genre.

However, Yogyakarta's hip-hop community has responded by asserting its own values and norms, which may include themes of social justice, local pride, and cultural heritage. This resistance to hegemony illustrates how cultural hybridity enables communities to negotiate their identities and assert their agency in the face of global influences.

Moreover, the local hip-hop scene in Yogyakarta serves as a platform for social commentary, addressing issues such as inequality, corruption, and cultural preservation. By incorporating local dialects, traditional instruments, and indigenous themes, artists create a hybrid identity that not only pays homage to American hip-hop but also critiques and redefines it within their own cultural framework. This dynamic interplay between global and local influences exemplifies how cultural hybridity can shape norms and values, allowing communities to forge their own identities while engaging with broader cultural narratives.

The relationship between cultural hybridity and the hegemony of American hip-hop in Yogyakarta highlights the community's ability to adapt and redefine global influences, creating a unique cultural

expression that reflects their values and experiences.

Soringin Hip-hop Festival

Soringin Hip-hop Festival in Wijilan, Yogyakarta, has emerged as a crucial cultural event within the local hip-hop community. Celebrated annually, the festival serves as both a showcase for local talent and a platform for cultural exchange within the global hip-hop scene. Its name, derived from the Javanese word 'Soringin', which means "shaded" or "sheltered", or "under the Banyan tree", reflects the festival's goal to provide a space for young artists to express their creativity and engage in meaningful dialogue through music, dance, and art. This festival is an essential vehicle for the community to reinforce its cultural identity while simultaneously embracing the global values of hip-hop.

Soringin Hip-hop Festival, held on Saturday, September 14, 2024, at JNM Bloc Yogyakarta, exemplifies the spirit of cultural fusion and creativity. This festival symbolizes how Yogyakarta has embraced global hip-hop culture and seamlessly woven it into its rich local traditions. The result is an electrifying celebration that not only reflects the universal allure of hip-hop but also showcases its unique Yogyakarta-inspired twist.

Attendees can look forward to a dynamic display of music, dance, and street art, creating an experience where every element resonates with the pulse of both global and local influences. Each performance and piece of art promises to connect with the audience, highlighting how the roots of hip-hop can thrive and evolve within the context of a different cultural backdrop. This fusion underscores how universal art forms can find new life and meaning when adapted to local settings.

With its vibrant blend of artistic expressions, Soringin Hip-hop Festival becomes more than just an event—it is a celebration of creativity and community. The festival invites participants to witness how music, graffiti, and dance come together to tell stories that bridge continents and generations. It stands as a living testament to the power of art to unify diverse traditions, making the connection between global culture and local heritage come alive in a way that is fresh, exciting, and deeply rooted in Yogyakarta's identity.

The Soringin Hip-Hop Festival is a tangible manifestation of the

progressive movement within Yogyakarta's hip-hop community, serving as a platform to channel their ideology, norms, and values through music and hip-hop culture. This festival is not merely a form of entertainment but also a space for expression where hip-hop artists can voice their ideas on identity, society, and culture in a relevant and engaging way. Embracing the spirit of freedom of expression, this festival provides a medium for the hip-hop community to showcase how traditional and modern values can harmoniously blend into their artistic creations.

More than just a music celebration, Soringin Hip-Hop Festival also serves as an educational platform and a space for exchanging ideas among hip-hop enthusiasts. Through lyrics, performances, and various supporting activities, the festival broadens the discourse on how hip-hop can be a tool for conveying social messages, critiquing contemporary issues, and fostering solidarity among communities. Hip-hop in Yogyakarta has evolved beyond just a music genre; it has become a movement that reflects local identity while embracing the global spirit carried by hip-hop culture itself.

With the presence of Soringin Hip-Hop Festival, Yogyakarta's hip-hop community proves that hip-hop is not solely a Western cultural product but can also be adapted and contextualized to align with local values and norms. This festival stands as evidence that hip-hop in Jogja is not only surviving but continuously growing, bringing new flavors to the music and cultural scene. More importantly, the festival solidifies hip-hop as a creative expression that is not only entertaining but also a driving force for social change and the preservation of local cultural values.
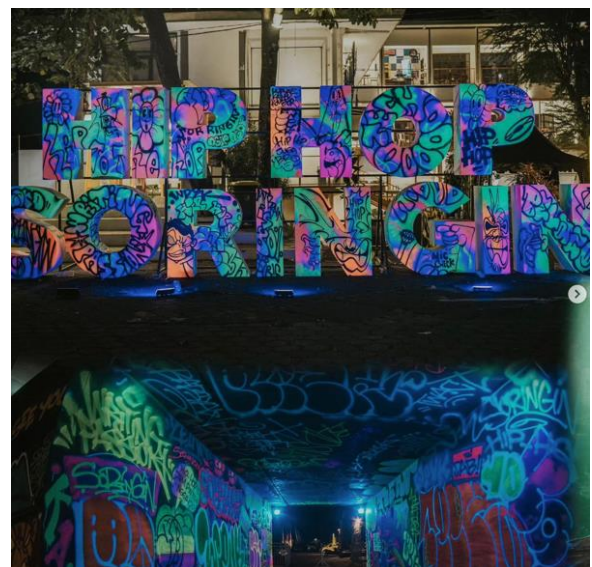
Figure 2. The Front Gate of *Soringin* Hip-hop Festival

One of the most striking elements featured in the Soringin Hip-hop Festival is graffiti. Daru Isnawan (personal communication, March 30, 2024), a graffiti artist,

describes graffiti as "penting dan seni [important and art]". This statement reflects the role of graffiti in Wijilan as both a form of artistic expression and a means of reclaiming public spaces. The vibrant graffiti culture in Wijilan transforms mundane urban spaces into platforms for storytelling and cultural dialogue. The role of graffiti in Soringin Hip-hop Festival underscores the dual nature of cultural expression as both personal and communal. Graffiti serves as a visual manifestation of the merging of American hip-hop and Javanese traditions, encapsulating the essence of hybridity that Bhabha describes. In this context, it is not just art but a form of dialogue that bridges different cultural values and narratives. The bold, colorful artworks reflect both the individualistic drive of artists seeking personal expression and the collective identity rooted in Javanese tradition, where public art is seen as a shared heritage.

Figure 3. Graffiti in *Soringin* Hip-hop Festival

This dynamic highlights how values and norms evolve within cultural hybridity. The acceptance and celebration of graffiti in Wijilan demonstrate the fluid adaptation of norms, where what was once considered subversive becomes a legitimate and embraced part of the community. This shift reflects Hansson's idea of the dynamic nature of values and norms, showing that as cultures interact, new interpretations of what is valuable and acceptable can emerge. Through these expressions, Wijilan's hip-hop community not only showcases cultural fusion but also redefines social boundaries, creating a space where diverse influences coexist and enrich one another.

Hip-hop as a culture has several elements that make it up. These elements consist of; DJ, Graffiti, b - boy / b -

girl, MC, Fifth element, and additional elements (Price, 2006). Hip-hop is a multifaceted culture composed of several key elements: DJing, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling, MCing, and the Fifth Element of Knowledge. Each component contributes uniquely to the overall identity of the culture. The DJ plays a foundational role in creating the beats and sounds of hip-hop music, while graffiti serves as a visual form of expression that reflects social and political messages. B-boying and b-girling are energetic dance styles that have become iconic representations of the culture's athleticism and creativity. Meanwhile, MCs deliver powerful lyrics that tell personal and societal stories through rhythm and rhyme.

In addition to these core elements, hip-hop also influences other cultural aspects such as fashion, language, and entrepreneurship. Artists serve as trendsetters, shaping streetwear and introducing new language that permeates mainstream culture. Together, these elements form a dynamic, evolving culture that continues to impact music, art, fashion, and global youth movements, making hip-hop more than just a genre—it is a powerful cultural force.

The main element in hip hop is the DJ or disc jockey, a person who plays and modifies music to get the desired rhythm or sound. The task of a DJ in hip-hop is to mix the music played so that the audience dances and enjoys the music.
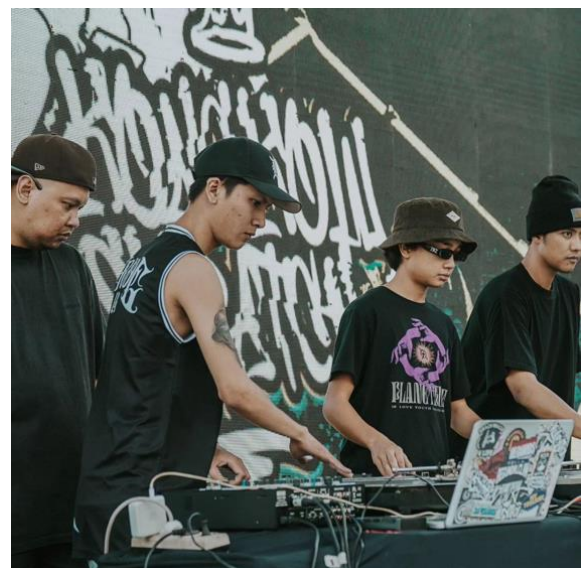
Figure 4. DJ (Disc Jockey) performance at Soringin Hip-hop Festival

The DJ, or disc jockey, has always been the cornerstone of hip-hop culture, serving as its primary architect. In the early days of hip hop during the 1970s, DJs like Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash were instrumental in developing the genre by experimenting with breakbeats and beat juggling techniques. DJs created the foundation for hip-hop by manipulating vinyl records to extend the instrumental breaks

in songs, which became known as "breaks", allowing break-dancers to showcase their moves. According to Chang (2005), this innovative use of turntables to manipulate and mix music set the stage for the entire hip-hop movement, as it emphasized rhythm and groove over traditional song structures.

The DJ's role in hip-hop goes beyond merely playing records; it involves an intricate understanding of rhythm, timing, and crowd dynamics. Techniques like scratching, beat-matching, and looping were developed to create seamless transitions between songs and to add unique sounds to the music. These techniques were essential in keeping the energy of the crowd high and ensuring that the music flowed smoothly throughout a performance or party. Rose (1994) highlights that the creativity of hip-hop DJs in manipulating sounds transformed the turntable into a musical instrument, turning what was initially a tool for playback into an expressive medium capable of producing new and dynamic audio experiences.

The influence of DJs in hip-hop extends beyond the music itself, shaping the culture's competitive and innovative spirit. DJs were not only responsible for providing the

beats but also for creating an environment that encouraged artistic expression and dance. Their ability to read the crowd and adapt their set to maintain energy and excitement was crucial in establishing the atmosphere of early hip-hop parties. According to Price (2006), the DJ's role in controlling the tempo, mood, and overall vibe of the event was foundational to hip hop's emergence as a social movement, as they set the stage for MCs and break dancers to perform and engage with the audience.

Figure 5. Gamellance dan M2MX, a famous MC in the Wijilan Hip-hop Community

The MC, or Master of Ceremonies, is a vital element of hip-hop culture, primarily responsible for engaging and energizing the audience during live performances. Initially, the role of the MC was to support the DJ by keeping the crowd entertained, delivering shout-outs, and creating a lively atmosphere at parties and events. MC is in charge of keeping the audience connected

to the event, supporting the DJ, by chanting certain meaningful verses and having a unique rhyme. Over time, the MC's role evolved into one of the most influential positions in hip hop, where their ability to connect with the audience through words and rhythm became central to the performance. According to Chang (2005), the transition of the MC from a simple hype-man to a central figure in hip-hop was driven by the need to create a narrative and give voice to the experiences and stories of the community.

One of the primary skills of an MC is their ability to chant verses and create rhymes that resonate with the audience. These verses often reflect social issues, personal experiences, or observations about the world, blending poetry with rhythm to deliver powerful messages. The rhyme patterns and wordplay used by MCs became a distinguishing feature of hip hop, setting it apart from other genres of music. Rose (1994) emphasizes that the creativity and linguistic innovation displayed by MCs not only entertain but also educate and provoke thought, making their rhymes a form of storytelling that reflects the realities of urban life and the culture's struggles.

As hip-hop evolved, the MC's role grew in importance, becoming synonymous with the art of rapping itself. Legendary MCs like Rakim, KRS-One, and Big Daddy Kane redefined the role by introducing complex rhyming techniques, intricate wordplay, and lyrical depth. They transformed the role of the MC into one of a poet and a social commentator, using their platform to address issues like racism, inequality, and empowerment. Price (2006) points out that the MCs of hip-hop are not merely performers but also influential voices who shape cultural narratives and inspire generations through their words and their messages.

The community is often involved in hip-hop events that unite the four elements of hip-hop culture: DJ, graffiti, and MC. They expressed,

> Biasanya sih kita satu kesatuan ya ... Kalau biasanya kayak acara yang sekarang ini, kayak hip-hop soringin ini selalu mewadahi 4 elemen hip hop [Usually, we are a unity... Like in events like this, like this hip-hop gathering, it always accommodates the 4 elements of hip-hop]" (Nur Oktavian, September 14, 2024).

It indicates that breakdance in Indonesia often exists in a structured event context with a specific format. Although they

appreciate events like "hip-hop gatherings", there is an awareness that breakdance in Indonesia is more directed toward an industrial form. In conversation, one community member emphasized,

> Kalau di Indonesia ini kan sering dijadikan industri. Jadi dia tidak back to the roots, tidak sesuai culture-nya [In Indonesia, it is often turned into an industry. So, it does not go back to the roots, it's not in line with its culture].

It shows that in Indonesia, breakdance is often integrated into formal events, unlike the roots of hip-hop culture in the US, which prioritize spontaneous street expression

Figure 6. Rebzvolution Performance in *Soringin* Hip-hop Festival

The Rebzvolution, a breakdance community, was founded in 2016 and has now

been active for eight years. Nur Oktavian (Personal communication, September 14, 2024), a.k.a Joker, as the leader of this community, stated, "Rebzvolution itu dari 2016. Ini tahun 2024 berarti kita udah jalan 8 tahun [Rebzvolution has been around since 2016. It is 2024 now, so we have been going for 8 years]". This statement indicates that, although relatively new within the landscape of local cultural development, the community has maintained its presence for a substantial period, demonstrating commitment and sustainability.

By integrating these elements, including graffiti's powerful storytelling aspect, Soringin Hip-hop Festival showcases more than just music and dance. It encapsulates a broader narrative that connects individual artistry with community identity, creating an event that is both an artistic celebration and a cultural statement. This blend ensures that while the festival embraces modern expressions, it remains rooted in the values and stories of Yogyakarta, making it a truly unique and inclusive cultural experience.

CONCLUSION

This Hip-hop culture, originating from the Bronx in

the 1970s, has transcended its roots to become a global cultural phenomenon that intersects with local traditions and values. In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, particularly in the neighborhood of Wijilan, hip-hop has evolved into a medium that harmonizes American individualistic values with the Javanese collective ethos of *gotong royong*. This adaptation has resulted in a form of cultural hybridity, blending elements such as rap, breakdancing, and graffiti with local art forms and languages, creating unique expressions that address local social and environmental issues. Soringin Hip-hop Festival exemplifies this fusion, showcasing how hip-hop can be both a form of entertainment and a cultural movement that fosters social awareness, community identity, and creative economy. The festival's inclusion of graffiti as a storytelling medium underscores the importance of visual art in reclaiming public spaces and fostering cultural dialogue. The ongoing commitment of communities like Rebzvolution highlights the sustainable growth of local hip-hop culture, reflecting how global influences are reshaped to enhance local identity and solidarity.

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Reflections on Reality: A Representation Analysis of Ethical Dilemmas in *Black Mirror*'s "Crocodile"

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ethical complexities surrounding memory-extracting technologies by analyzing the speculative narrative of *Black Mirror*'s episode "Crocodile". Employing Stuart Hall's representation theory as the main analytical framework and guided by Jawad's research on brain-computer interface (BCI) ethics focusing on the ethical lenses of autonomy, privacy, and security, as well as responsibility and regulation, the study investigates how the Recaller device represents broader societal anxieties about surveillance, control, and the erosion of personal boundaries. Through content and discourse analysis, the research unpacks how "Crocodile" constructs meaning around the loss of individual agency and the moral consequences of technological overreach. The episode presents a dystopian world where memories are no longer private, forcing characters into ethically fraught situations. This study argues that the episode not only dramatizes the potential dangers of intrusive technologies but also reflects cultural fears about the future of privacy, autonomy, and moral responsibility. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of critically assessing how emerging technologies might reshape societal values, ethics, and communication practices.

Keywords: *dystopia; memory; privacy; representation; surveillance*

INTRODUCTION

Dystopian fiction often serves as a potent lens through which to examine the concerns and possibilities of our technological present. With its chilling depictions of a dystopian world driven by futuristic and unsettling technological advancements, the Netflix series *Black Mirror* is an excellent example of this. The series premiered in 2011 as an anthology, with 27 episodes released up until 2024. Black Mirror episodes mostly explore the extremes of how technology and media could affect human lives in the near future. *Black Mirror* episodes bring dystopia as their main theme. Schulzke (2014) defined the dystopia narrative as the consequence of bad policies, an unsustainable way of life, and human degradation. Most *Black Mirror* episodes, including "Crocodile," have rather recent settings compared to other dystopian movies or shows, considering how advanced the technologies introduced in the series are. By putting on a timeline based on the technology, media, and other clues presented in each of the Black Mirror episodes, some fans on the internet predicted the Recaller era depicted in "Crocodile" in the decade of the 2030s. It is also supported by the sets and background in the episode where the technology portrayed is similar to what exists in the 2020s.

In its episode "Crocodile", the series dives into the eerie implications of a device known as the Recaller, a neurotechnology device capable of extracting and displaying a person's memories. This concept warns about the potential for unchecked technological control over the most private and vulnerable experiences, representing concerns that are being faced in our increasingly technologically saturated world.

The episode follows Mia Nolan, a renowned architect who is the episode's villain protagonist. Mia is introduced as a witness in an involuntary manslaughter incident and later as a witness in an accident involving a self-driving pizza van that hits a cyclist. The pizza van incident leads Mia to use Recaller technology on her.

The government is mandating the use of Recaller for witnesses of incidents, including accidents or crimes, to obtain testimony and corroboration. Law enforcement agencies and insurance companies are leveraging this mandate, reflecting concerns about the intrusive role of

technology in controlling human behavior and reshaping societal norms. In the episode, an insurance company investigator, Shazia, uses the Recaller to get witness statements and corroborations in the pizza van incident.

The device uses a small, needled chip on the witness' temple to access and interpret memories and then display them in audio and visual form. The device's output is accessed via a pair of earphones and what seems to be an old-school cathode-ray tube monitor. Although described as a device that reads only subjective memory related to the incident, Mia's attempts to hide her memory of her past incidents eventually fail.

Figure 1. Depiction of The Recaller device
Source: memoiretotale.org

To critically analyze this portrayal, the study applies Stuart Hall's representation

theory, particularly the constructionist approach, which views meaning as created through language, symbols, and cultural context rather than existing inherently in objects. Media, especially speculative fiction like Black Mirror, does not only reflect reality but also actively constructs it, shaping how society understands emerging technologies and their ethical consequences. By using this framework, the research positions "Crocodile" as a cultural text that constructs meaning around memory, control, and surveillance.

While fictional, the Recaller resonates with real-world anxieties about how rapidly evolving technologies could undermine human autonomy and redefine consent. In a time where personal data is increasingly commodified, "Crocodile" offers a critical reflection on what it means to have control over one's own memories and the ethical costs when that control is lost.

In recent years, the rapid development of brain-computer interface (BCI) technologies has further intensified these concerns. Emerging BCI technologies that are designed to create direct communication pathways between the brain and machines, could advance the idea of accessing and manipulating human thoughts and

memories. Although still in development, BCI development introduces complex ethical challenges about cognitive privacy, mental autonomy, and consent. The possibilities of technology blur the boundary between what is imagined in fiction and what is becoming scientifically possible. This growing technological landscape analyzes "Crocodile" even more relevant, as the episode offers a critical reflection on the potential risks of mind-reading and surveillance technologies that are no longer entirely speculative. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the following question: How does *Black Mirror*'s "Crocodile" represent the ethical concerns of memory extraction technology through Stuart Hall's representation theory?

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on analyzing *Black Mirror*'s "Crocodile" using a qualitative approach, specifically within the framework of Stuart Hall's representation theory. The study aims to explore how the episode constructs meaning around mind-reading technology, memory manipulation, and the resulting ethical dilemmas. Hall's representation theory, particularly the constructionist approach, provides the foundation for

understanding how "Crocodile" produces and communicates meaning about technological power, surveillance, and human agency.

Hall's constructionist approach views meaning as not inherent in objects or symbols but as created and negotiated through language, cultural practices, and power relations. In the context of "Crocodile", this perspective is essential for understanding how the episode represents the Recaller device not just as a piece of speculative technology, but as a symbol of larger societal fears surrounding privacy, consent, and institutional control. The Recaller becomes a metaphor for real-world concerns about technological overreach, the erosion of personal autonomy, and the commodification of human memory.

The study applies a combination of content analysis and discourse analysis to the episode. Content analysis is used to examine the narrative elements, including the storyline, character actions, dialogue, and visual depictions of the Recaller device. It allows for a systematic understanding of how memory extraction technology is represented in the episode and how it drives the plot forward. The analysis pays particular

attention to scenes where the Recaller is used, exploring how the device functions within the story and the ways it alters character behavior and decision-making process.

Discourse analysis complements the content analysis by unpacking the ideological and cultural meanings embedded in the episode's dialogue and narrative choices. It examines how the language used by characters, especially during moments of moral conflict or technological use, reflects broader societal discourses on surveillance, privacy, and ethical responsibility. For instance, the moments when characters justify the use of the Recaller or express fear and resistance towards it are critically analyzed to understand how consent is constructed or undermined in the story.

The analysis also considers the visual representation of the Recaller device itself, including its physical design, the invasive method of memory extraction, and the way the device is embedded into social and legal systems within the story. The visual elements are key to understanding how the technology is portrayed as both mundane and terrifying, reflecting the potential normalization of invasive surveillance in society.

Secondary literature on memory theory, neuroethics, surveillance studies, and speculative fiction is incorporated to provide theoretical support and deepen the analysis. This includes scientific perspectives on how memory works biologically and psychologically, as well as philosophical discussions about the ethics of memory manipulation and technological control. The study also engages with research on dystopian fiction, which often serves as a reflection of cultural concerns about the future.

This research uses Jawad's 2021 research regarding the ethical issues pertaining to Brain-Computer Interface (BCI) as a guideline. Jawad's research shows how BCI interacts with user safety, humanity and personhood, autonomy, stigma and normality, privacy and security, responsibility and regulation, and justice of human beings. This research will specifically discuss the ethical issues portrayed in the episode through the lenses of autonomy; privacy and security; and also responsibility and regulation aspects.

Through this methodological approach, the research seeks to

answer the central question: How does *Black Mirror*'s "Crocodile" represent the ethical concerns of memory extraction technology through the lens of Stuart Hall's representation theory? By grounding the analysis in representation theory and contextualizing it with relevant secondary literature, the study aims to reveal how "Crocodile" functions as a cultural text that critiques the potential dangers of unchecked technological advancements in surveillance and memory manipulation.

Ultimately, this methodology enables a comprehensive exploration of the episode as a medium where fictional technology intersects with real-world ethical concerns, offering insights into how media representations shape and reflect societal fears about the future of human agency, privacy, and the power of technological systems.

DISCUSSION

The episode "Crocodile" places the Recaller technology within mundane contexts like insurance investigations, illustrating how invasive tools can become normalized under bureaucratic justifications. By embedding the Recaller into routine activities, the narrative shows how advanced technologies, initially designed for societal benefit, can be co-opted to serve private interests. This normalization blurs the ethical boundaries of consent and privacy and pushes the audience to question how easily technological intrusions could be accepted in real-world scenarios when framed as necessary for efficiency or justice.

Furthermore, "Crocodile" amplifies these concerns by showing how the Recaller facilitates a chain of violence that escalates beyond the control of its users. The technology's ability to extract memories with clarity becomes both its strength and its ethical flaw, as it disregards context and the emotional, psychological, and moral complexities of human memory. Through Mia's fall into moral collapse, the narrative reveals that while the Recaller seeks objective truth, it simultaneously erodes human empathy and accountability. This duality reinforces the need to critically examine the ethical implications of similar technologies as they move forward closer to reality.

These narrative choices in Crocodile set the stage for deeper ethical questions about how such technology reshapes fundamental human values. By

portraying the Recaller's impact on individual choices, personal privacy, and institutional accountability, the episode invites viewers to reflect on the moral dilemmas embedded in technological progress. This discussion will first discuss the general representation of the episode through the sub-section "Crocodile", then further analyze the episode through three interrelated ethical lenses: autonomy, privacy and security, and responsibility and regulation. The ethical lenses used in this section will unpack how Crocodile critiques the potential consequences of mind-reading technologies on society and the human condition.

Crocodile

"Crocodile" opens with a scene of a couple riding in a car, intoxicated, eventually crashing into a cyclist. Mia, the episode's main character, sits on the passenger's side. The driver of the car is her then-boyfriend, Rob. Mia's lines express that she was guilty, disturbed, and moved to do something responsible, such as calling someone about it. Meanwhile, Rob seems to think ahead and wants to remove the evidence to avoid the consequences:

... Fucking hell, Mia. Think, OK, hey? You need to think, baby. We've been fucking caning it, yeah? And I-- This is prison, yeah? A fucking instant prison. I've got fuck knows how much drink in me, I fucking hit a guy. Now, they will put me in the cell. I'm the driver, they'll fu—They'll put me in a cell and fucking keep me there. (Hillcoat, 2017, 0:02:17

The couple finally decides to throw the dead cyclist into the river in a sleeping bag they found in their car, removing the evidence as Rob wishes. Mia shows her guilt and nerve in the scene as she throws up after discarding the body.

The scene, in the beginning, represents the present era, or in the show, considered the pre-Recaller era, where concealing a murder or manslaughter is a matter of hiding or discarding the body and evidence.

The scene then jumps to fifteen years after the incident. Mia speaks in front of an audience about her company at a forum. She then went back to her hotel after the event, where newly sober Rob came to meet her. Rob reveals that a news article came up this morning with a woman who turns out to be the widow of the cyclist that they

ran over fifteen years ago. The recently sober Rob wants to write the widow an anonymous letter showing her that he is deeply remorseful about the accident. Rob seems to be guilty as he says he cannot live with it.

On the other hand, Mia thinks it is a bad idea; she wants to leave the incident behind as she has gained acknowledgment and a public view of her work. The conversation turns into a debate and, eventually, an altercation. Mia accidentally breaks Rob's neck, killing him.

Shaken by what she has done, Mia gazes out the window, where she coincidentally witnesses an accident where a self-driving pizza van hits a pedestrian. She shrugs it off and continues to dispose of Rob's body while turning a pornography movie on the hotel's television to set an alibi.

An insurance company, Realm Insurance, investigated the self-driving pizza van incident. The episode introduces Shazia, Realm Insurance's investigator. Shazia visited the pedestrian and used the Recaller technology to recall his memory of the accident. The Recaller consists of a pair of electrodes to be pinned into the witness' temple, a pair of

earbuds, and what seems to be an old-school tube monitor.

Shazia brings a bottle of beer for the witness to smell, believing that the sensory trigger would help to jog the memory since the location of the incident is near a brewery.

The Recaller works by reading the mind's signal and translating it into an audio-visual output:

> ... So, this accesses engrams, your memories of what happened. Now, they're subjective. They may not be totally accurate, and they're often emotional, but by collecting a range of recollections from yourself and any witnesses, we can help build a corroborative picture of the whole. (Hillcoat, 2017, 0:24:21)

Based on the dialogue, it is revealed that the Recaller works subjectively. The device pulls recollection from the witness based on how the witness remembers, not how the events were received by the eyes of the witness. According to neurobiology, memory is the process of retaining knowledge over a period of time to affect future actions (Sherwood, 2015, 157-162). How the recaller works aligns with Anderson's classification of memory, which are declarative (explicit) and procedural (implicit) memories (2013). The subjective

thoughts in the dialogue are classified as explicit memories that can be recalled consciously. The explicit memory is stored in the medial part of the temporal lobe of the cerebrum and hippocampus (Mujawar et al., 2021). With this fact, the electrode placement depicted in the show represents how the device taps into the memory of the subject and physically to the temporal lobe.
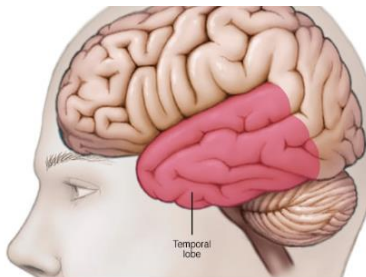
Figure 2. Position of the temporal lobe
Source: mayoclinic.org

Figure 3. The placement of Recaller device
Source: screenspy.com

The Recaller: Public Perception and Reality

The placement of the electrodes also represents how the public would perceive a mind-reading device. As early as 1964, the device was depicted as a wearable

headpiece, as seen in the 1964 movie *The Misadventure of Merlin Jones*.

It also represents real "mind-reading" devices, such as EEG machines, which use electrodes placed in the brain area being scanned.

Figure 4. Depiction of mind reading device in The Misadventure of Merlin Jones
Source: movies.disney.com
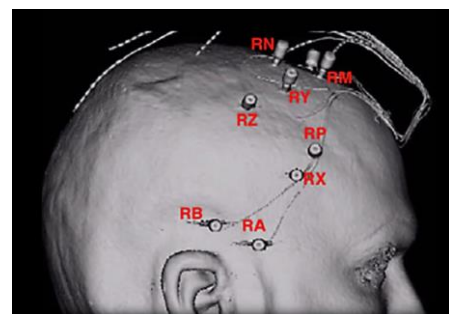
Figure 5. Position of the EEG electrodes for temporal lobe scan
Source: mayoclinic.com

The Recaller: Ethics and Challenges

From the pedestrian's memory, Shazia is led to a

female passerby, who leads her to Mia as a witness because she was looking at the accident from her hotel window. Because Shazia needs to interview Mia as a witness, she takes a lengthy drive to Mia's house to collect her testimony in a memory form to corroborate the other witnesses' testimony.

When Shazia arrived, Mia was shown The Recaller. Knowing that she has two manslaughter incidents she was a part of, she refuses to use the device on her. However, Shazia explains that the use of the device has been mandatory since the previous year.

> ... it's a legal requirement since last year. Well, if you've witnessed an incident, yes. I have to notify the police when people refuse, and when they get involved, it just drags everything out, so... (Hillcoat, 2017, 0:38:17)

Hesitantly, Mia invites Shazia inside. Mia attempts to reject the use of The Recaller on her. However, her verbal explanation of her recollection of the accident does not satisfy Shazia.

> … It's sometimes hard to articulate what your mind's eye's seen, but capturing your impression of what you saw is really useful.... (Hillcoat, 2017, 0:39:21)

Given the possibility of seeing testimony in an audio and visual form, it is understandable that a verbal testimony will not satisfy the investigator. The dissatisfaction of verbal testimony represents how human beings are dissatisfied with a certain technology if the recent technology gives better results than the former. There are many parallels of the interplay between how the current technology works and how humans react to it, namely how TikTok is more addicting to former social media platforms as it employs reward-based learning more aggressively than its predecessors (Petrillo, 2021), resulting in more satisfaction for its users.

Shazia finally performs the same thing to Mia as she did with the pedestrian: she pins the electrodes to Mia's temple, puts on the earbuds, and gives Mia a sniff of the beer.

Knowing that The Recaller works subjectively, Mia tries to modify her recollection. She convinces herself that she was alone in the hotel room, ordered room service, and watched pornography. She repeatedly says it to herself, hoping it will show up when the device probes into her brain.

Despite her effort to shield and alter her real recollection

of the event, Mia's real memory of murdering Rob is still revealed by The Recaller. The method of repeating a "mantra" used by Mia to attempt to modify her memory is similar to concentrative meditation, which is commonly used as a psychological therapy for anxiety and trauma (Krishnakumar et al., 2015). Scientifically, memory modification can happen as memory is consolidated and reconsolidated over time (Stickgold & Walker, 2005). However, based on the research carried out by Wheeler et al. (2000), the process does not happen in a few minutes but rather over an inconsistent period.

The relatively non-consensual recollection pulled by the device can be seen as the double-edged sword of free will, as it suggests possible ethical violations that are a function of the lack of true awareness and consent on the part of subjects (Wilson et al., 2008). Even though the subject consents to putting the device on, they are unable to choose which memory is being recalled by the device. It is similar to what humankind experienced in this era, where advertisement bombardment was designed based on our preferences on the internet. It can also represent today's experience where only one in five mobile application users or website visitors read the privacy policy fully yet accept it (Atske & Atske, 2024).

The Recaller: Consequences and Future Implications

Panic engulfs Shazia as the realization van that a murder had been witnessed without her involvement in any investigation. In a state of distress, Shazia is compelled to run to her van, asserting that Mia's testimony captured through The Recaller will be sufficient for her purposes. Meanwhile, Mia experiences her own turmoil, fearing potential trouble stemming from the reflections of her memory. In a moment of desperation, she decides to grab Shazia, effectively kidnapping her.

Once Shazia is restrained, Mia proceeds to interrogate her using The Recaller, motivated by a desire to ascertain whether Shazia had disclosed her visit to anyone. The Recaller reveals that Shazia has previously informed her husband about her intention to visit Mia's house to obtain testimony regarding the pizza van accident. This revelation leaves Mia agitated and anxious, she feels that she needs to remove the evidence by eliminating Shazia's husband.

Consequently, she drives to Shazia's house.

In an act of desperation, Mia murders Shazia's husband and baby, aiming to erase any memories that could potentially link back to her. The need for this drastic measure stems from the fear of being implicated in the events surrounding the murders Mia had witnessed and implicated. Mia then flees the scene.

When police arrive at Shazia's house to conduct their investigation into the murders, it is shown that a guinea pig present in the baby's room remains unharmed. This detail raised questions about the nature of the events that had unfolded.

The investigation then took an unusual turn as the authorities proceeded to use The Recaller on the unharmed guinea pig. The episode concluded on a cliffhanger, leaving it ambiguous whether the technology could be employed effectively against all animals, or if its capabilities were limited exclusively to humans. This unresolved tension highlighted the evolving nature of evidence collection and witness interrogation in a world where technology had transformed traditional methods.

The concealment of murder or manslaughter had indeed become increasingly complicated in the era of The Recaller, especially compared to the pre-Recaller era. The dynamics of removing witnesses and evidence were now rendered more intricate due to a fundamental shift in the definition of a witness. No longer were witnesses confined solely to human beings capable of relaying testimony; the scope had expanded to include any sentient beings possessing brains that could register sensory signals.

This shift in definition raised significant implications for legal and ethical considerations in criminal investigations. The potential for non-human witnesses to possess information that could lead to breakthroughs in cases altered the landscape of forensic methodologies. As the boundaries of witness credibility were redefined, the implications of interrogating not only humans but also animals prompted broader discussions about the ethical treatment of these sentient beings within legal frameworks.

Moreover, the reliance on technology such as The Recaller highlighted inherent issues of privacy and consent. The act of extracting information from both human and non-human

witnesses begged the question of whether consent would be necessary and how it could be ethically obtained from sentient creatures. The moral complexities of using such technology raised concerns about exploitation and the potential misuse of power.

The narrative posed a chilling reflection on the nature of crime in an age dominated by surveillance and technological intrusion. The advancements represented by The Recaller served as both a tool for justice and a means for individuals to manipulate truth for their own ends. With the ability to access memories and information from any being, the distinction between knowledge and ignorance became increasingly blurred.

As the implications of these technological advancements continued to unfold, a pressing need for ethical guidelines and a re-evaluation of legal standards became apparent. The tension set forth by the events surrounding Mia and Shazia showcased a world grappling with the consequences of its own inventions, where the past could be revisited, and truths could be obscured through manipulation.

The possibility of the use of similar technologies with The Recaller not only transformed the landscape of criminal investigations but also prompted profound ethical and philosophical questions about the nature of testimony, witness credibility, and the boundaries of privacy. The complexities introduced by technology in criminal acts underscored the ongoing struggle between innovation and morality, echoing a cautionary tale for society moving forward.

Crocodile Through Ethical Lenses

Autonomy

The use of the Recaller device can take away the autonomy of individuals by making the memory retrieval process seem procedural and harmless, yet deeply coercive. The victim of the pizza van accident expresses this concern by saying that he feels like a specimen when Shazia first put the Recaller on him (Hillcoat, 2017, 00:24:15). The victim hesitates but complies, reflecting how the perceived 'routine' nature masks the ethical breach. Although verbal consent is requested, refusal seems to be socially difficult, reducing the free will to mere formality.

In another scene, Mia tried to refuse the use of Recaller on her. Her desperation

escalates as she realizes Shazia might uncover the murder.

> ... it's a legal requirement since last year. Well, if you've witnessed an incident, yes. I have to notify the police when people refuse, and when they get involved, it just drags everything out, so... (Hillcoat, 2017, 0:38:17)

The scene shows that Mia's sense of autonomy collapses. She is forced into a binary, either submit her memories or face greater consequences. This scene shows that when someone tries to refuse the Recaller, the insurance company has a procedure in place to involve the law enforcement agency, making it practically impossible to refuse.

Mia attempts to refuse the use of the Recaller once again after they sit down, saying that she will be able to make a statement orally based on her memory. Shazia lets her and asks her the speed the van is going and Mia stutters. Shazia uses that opportunity to ensure Mia that the use of the Recaller is necessary to get the full picture.

Based on Hall's encoding/decoding concept, The state or corporations encode the Recaller as a neutral, procedural tool, while individuals decode it based on

their lived experiences. However, the power to define the situation remains with the institution, limiting individual autonomy.

In addition, the Recaller is introduced and popularized to be an aid, a tool that reveals the truth. Instead, it transforms into a weapon that corners individuals, proving that in a highly technological society, autonomy is not taken by force, but it is surrendered piece by piece through systems that appear harmless.

Privacy and Security

The Recaller's invasive power disrupts the notion of private memories, transforming internal thoughts into external, sharable content. Throughout Crocodile, this theme is repeatedly illustrated through scenes where interviews using Recaller extract far more than intended.

One of the examples of this instance is when a random witness, simply recalling the pizza van accident, accidentally reveals an image of Mia, near the window of her hotel room.

> ... I saw some woman staring at something. So I looked down, it was just a load of commotion. There was a woman in a sort of lime coat… (Hillcoat, 2017, 0:33:16)

Figure 6. Mia's image through the
Recaller
Source: Netflix.com

This leads Shazia to realize the importance of this unintended data, another witness with a different point of view. This moment exemplifies memory collateral damage, a concept where unrelated private information becomes exposed because memory is interconnected.

Shazia's reassurances to the bystander are equally telling, "What we do is build up an overall average, a crowd-sourced picture of reality". This highlights that people do not even realize the scope of what they involuntarily record. As a result, they have no control over what private moments might surface during the scan. This raises profound ethical concerns because the technology does not respect contextual boundaries.

The power dynamics represented in these scenes are crucial. The Recaller does not function as a neutral tool as it is always wielded by someone with institutional authority, such as the insurance company.

Hall's theory highlights how meaning is constructed not only through the object but also through its usage and context. In Crocodile, the Recaller is framed as an instrument of control, granting the user disproportionate access to another's inner world. This dynamic strips individual of their ability and right to secure their private memories.

The Recaller's design also lacks safeguards. Once memories are externalized, their security becomes the company's responsibility and property, yet the system has no visible checks. There is no encryption, no consent form for accidental data, and no clear protocol if a witness sees something traumatic or incriminating. It is shown in the episode that even though there is a verbal statement extracted before the legal use of the Recaller, the device can be used without consent, as shown by how Mia forcibly uses the Recaller on Shazia.

After knowing that Shazia also has a family, Mia visits Shazia's home with a hammer. Mia proceeds with murdering Shazia's husband in the bathtub. Mia shows guilt and frustration as she cries after the murder. When she gets out of the bathroom, she hears a baby and gets closer to the sound. The scene cuts to

Shazia's baby, cooing and babbling. Mia is shown to be conflicted and scared of either being caught or having to murder a baby. By this point, she is only thinking about removing evidence and eventually kills the baby. The episode ends with Mia attending her son's school play, juxtaposed against the knowledge that she has killed a family just to save herself.

This illustrates how the Recaller creates a world where no one, not even a small child who has no ability to make a statement, is free from the risk of surveillance. Privacy is no longer about secrecy, but it is also about survival. In addition, this scene also vividly represents the loss of privacy as an inevitable consequence of blurring the line between privacy and evidence, leaving individuals exposed in the most intimate and irreparable ways.

Responsibility and Regulation

Perhaps the most dystopian aspect of Crocodile is that the Recaller is not only owned or operated by law enforcement but by a private insurance company. Shazia is not a police officer or a lawyer, but a mere claims adjuster. This use of intrusive technology exposes a world where ethical oversight is entirely absent.

Shazia's casual tone when she talks about the Recaller throughout the episode reflects how normalized this power imbalance has become. At one point, she reassures a witness that she will not add his embarrassing memory to the accident report. She simply says that the secret is safe with her. The promise sounds reassuring but is legally empty. There is no mention of ensuring deletion or making sure that only relevant recordings are kept. It looks like there are no regulations about what happens if a scan accidentally uncovers unrelated crimes. Even worse, Shazia mentioned to one of the witnesses that she has to bring the recording to a law enforcement agency if she sees that the memory indicates that the person is harming themselves or another person.

From the perspective of regulatory ethics, this is far from ideal. Mia's spiral into violence is not triggered by a police investigation, but by bureaucratic actions that are entirely irrelevant to her. It is not state power, but corporate negligence that turns this type of technology into a lethal force.

When Mia confronts Shazia, it is clear that the system has no safety valve. Shazia has no authority to stop the process

even if she senses danger. Mia begs: "You can just delete it, right?" But Shazia's silence confirms that even she has no control once the data is extracted. By outsourcing memory retrieval to the private sector, society has created a world where responsibility is fragmented, as no one is truly accountable. As a result, this practice has put everyone at risk.

In the final scenes, the police arrive at the aftermath, revealing that they are able to retrieve the pet guinea pig's memory.

Figure 7. Guinea Pig and the Recaller
Source: Netflix.com

It is implied that they retrieve Mia's image from the pet's recollection, proving that the technology has no biological or ethical limits. Regulation is so absent that even non-human memories can be weaponized. It is also implied that all organisms that are able to see and store memory in a rather long-term fashion can be treated as a security camera.

Hall's representation theory reminds us that meaning is never fixed. In this context, the Recaller is supposed to be meant as a truth-finding device but is perceived by Mia as an instrument of terror because institutions define its use through economic and legal lenses, not moral ones.

CONCLUSION

Through the lens of Hall's representation theory, "Crocodile" constructs a powerful critique of how technological advancements reshape societal perceptions of privacy, autonomy, and moral responsibility. The Recaller is represented as a mundane yet terrifying object, ordinary in design but extraordinary in its ability to penetrate the most private corners of human memory. This device becomes a symbol of contemporary fears regarding surveillance, reflecting growing concerns over how personal data can be extracted, commodified, and weaponized by those in power. Mia's descent into violence serves as a representation of how technology's invasive potential forces individuals into morally impossible situations. Her repeated acts of murder illustrate how the need to protect one's secrets becomes an act of survival in a world where memories can no longer be kept private. Hall's

theory helps see that Mia is not just an individual making choices but a representation of broader societal anxieties—where the erosion of privacy leads to the breakdown of moral boundaries and the dehumanization of both self and others. "Crocodile" serves as a warning about the ethical consequences of unchecked technological surveillance and represents the growing fear that as technology advances, personal autonomy and privacy may become casualties in the pursuit of truth and control.

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The Commodification of Romance Thriller in Netflix's *You* Series

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine how the *You* series uses the male gaze to commodify romance and thriller elements and manipulate aspects of the genre to draw viewers. Additionally, the analysis of the *You* series reveals that it questions patriarchal beliefs and gender representation in the media. In reviewing this research, qualitative analysis methods were used, and Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze theory was applied to analyze the data after examining primary and secondary data and finding supporting theories for the data. This research also uses a Transnational perspective to understand how Netflix produces, distributes, and consumes this genre in various countries and cultures. The result of this research concluded that the *You* series criticized the dynamics in heterosexual relationships, especially the concept that men should protect women in a way that often leads to control and violence. The *You* series encourages the audience to reconsider protection in relationships, exposing how these seemingly ideals can be weaponized and distorted into control, obsession, and violence.

Keywords: *male gaze; romance; series; thriller*

INTRODUCTION

The commodification of literary genres has long been an aspect of publishing industry reflecting boarder cultural trends. As (Greco et al., 2006) observe, "Publishing is not just cultural enterprise; it is also commercial activity deeply embedded in market

structures and consumer preferences" (p.5). Romance and thriller stand out for their distinct characteristics, wide popularity, and tradability in the cultural market. The hybrid genre of thriller romance is also gaining traction, combining the genre to readers' ever-evolving preferences. The elements of romance and thriller often result in an interesting story in terms of emotion and tension to the audience. The function of genre in the context of a film or series is to group works based on elements such as theme, atmosphere, setting and storytelling.

Furthermore, genre plays an important role in helping audiences determine their tastes and choose the films or series they want to enjoy based on the audience's preferences, interpretations. Many audiences choose their favourite genre which provides comfort and satisfaction. Genres are also part of a person's social and cultural identity, as well as the exploration and discovery of new works for those who try to watch genre films or series. From an industry perspective, genres help with the marketing and distribution of films. A film or series with proper

genre determination helps filmmakers and distributors reach a larger target audience (Berry-Flint, 2003). Thus, genre serves as an important tool in navigating the world of movies and series helping the audience to easily determine the genre that the audience likes and enjoys.

The American Journal of Cultural Sociology discusses the impact and reach of romance genre fiction, further supporting its popularity and demand (Michelson, 2022). The Publishing Research Quarterly examines the romance publishing industry and its pervasive influence, reinforcing its position as a highly sought-after genre (Cameron, 2020). Thus, the romance genre is one of the genres in film that is the most popular and in great demand by many audiences around the world. The popularity of the romance genre offers stories that are universal and touching and are able to reach various levels of society. Romance films or series tell the theme of love, which is one of the most basic emotions experienced by all humans. Love comes in many forms and can be felt by anyone, regardless of gender, age, and cultural background. The audience is invited to follow the emotional journey

of the main character, understanding struggles, happiness, and sadness. Relationships that develop on-screen movies and series often feel real and can reflect their own relationships. Relatable characters and emotional plots make the audience emotionally attached to the story, which can increase audience satisfaction. Therefore, romantic films and series are able to reach a wide and diverse audience. Audiences from different parts of the world can feel and understand the feelings depicted in romance films, be it the first love ending, happiness, or even heartbreak.

One of the main strengths of romance films and series is the diversity of sub-genres. Romance comes in many contexts and forms and is not limited to simple love. The romance genre is divided into several, namely contemporary romance, which depicts love relationships in the modern world with all complexities, historical romance with historical and cultural settings, and romance comedy which combines humor elements with light and fun love stories. The diversity of romance genres continues to grow and find new ways to

attract audiences so as not to be monotonous.

On the contrary, thriller films and series captivate the audience with a scenario full of suspense. Typically, an audience experiences excitement, anticipation, and anxiety when viewing a thriller. Because they may so readily be combined with any other genre, thrillers typically have a lot of subgenres. The thriller component can then be used in many other genres. Action, psychological, historical, and even romantic thrillers are a few genres that fit this category (Hellerman, 2023). Crime thrillers have antagonists such as terrorists, criminals, or insane people. These antagonists are often thematically linked to plots that involve political intrigues, terrorism, or murder. Meanwhile, psychological thrillers may center on obsession, false allegations, or even paranoia and deal with stalkers or sociopaths.

Thriller is also a favourite among film and series audiences, although scripts in this genre often tell creepy stories. One of the characteristics of the thriller genre is suspense, which presents high-risk

situations, unexpected threats, and surprising plot twists to make the audience think and guess. With elements of suspense, surprising plot twists, complex characters, and a tense atmosphere, thrillers provide a thrilling and satisfying viewing experience. However, the thriller genre remains popular and also has a worldwide audience. The commodification of thriller films and series involves the production of gripping narratives that follow a fast-moving, plot-driven structure. Majer defines the media as a key element in shaping human perceptions of serial killers, and the media often portrays them as monsters to attract the audience's attention (Majer, 2023).

Hybridity genre in the context of the romance thriller genre is a combination of elements from two different genres, namely romance and thriller to create a unique and interesting work. In the hybridity genre, romantic elements, such as the relationship between the main characters and the theme of love, are combined with thriller elements such as suspense, mystery, and threat. According to (Dowd et al., 2021) certain film genres – romantic films – have begun to

provide diverse depictions of female characters or continue to support stereotypical understandings of women as subordinate to the men in their lives. In that case, his genre appeals to audiences who are looking for emotional involvement from romantic storylines and suspense from thriller scenes. The commodification of this hybrid genre involves crafting a narrative that balances romance and suspense, often featuring the protagonist navigating romantic interests and dangerous situations. This genre gained popularity for its ability to provide diverse experiences and appealed to fans of both parent genres. So, the romance, thriller, and hybrid romance thriller genres reflect broader trends in popular culture.

Netflix's *You* exemplifies the hybrid commodification of genres in popular culture by blending romantic and psychological thriller to both entertain and provoke reflection. This fusion is not just stylistic – it reveals how traditional romance tropes in fated love, longing gazes, surveillance, and violence. The series constructs a heteronormative love story that initially appears charming but quickly deteriorates into obsessions

and manipulations. This challenges the audience's moral alignment. By centering Joe Goldberg's disturbing yet charismatic perspective, *You* complicate the audience's emotional response, forcing them to confront the thin line between affection and control. The result is a series that not only keeps the audience in suspense but also interrogates the ethical boundaries of love and desire in media narratives.

This research focuses on the hybridity of the romance thriller series *You* genre, which was distributed by Netflix in 2018 and is still in production until 2024. The series consists of 4 seasons and will air season 5 next year. The researcher chose this topic because the combination of romance and thriller genres in one series has a large audience SVOD (subscription video on demand) or Netflix uses international coverage from different countries to access all services on the platform (Lotz, 2021). Netflix, as a global distributor, plays an important role in spreading and normalizing certain values and norms through marketing strategies and narratives.

Realizing this series tells about women who are victims of men, is one of the issues in intimate partner violence. The issue is often discussed and fought for. Particularly in the United States, this problem is well ingrained in society. Because gender stereotypes are still prevalent, women are often the victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in films. This reflects reality and reinforces traditional values about women as vulnerable parties. However, films with Intimate Partner Violence are still being produced and attract audience globally. And then, the film encourages social change, inspires social change, and opens up space for discussion.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method to analyze this research. According to Creswell in (Nguyen et al., 2022) qualitative research is a type of research that explores and understands meaning in a number of individuals or groups of people that come from social problems. In analyzing this research, Laura Mulvey's theory is used without including screenshots so that this research emphasizes theoretical analysis over visual illustrations. As Mulvey (1975) argues, "The determining male gaze projects it is phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (p.11),

highlighting the ideological constructions of feminity in visual narratives, uses cinematic techniques, textual description, and characteristics. Cinematic techniques will be used to understand and analyze, such as the characters, plot, and theme in each scene in the *You* series in season 1, which features Male Gaze by watching and understanding the series. Then, include relevant dialogues in literature, journals, online media, and relevant news to be used as research references.

After the data is collected, it is continued to analyze the data obtained in several ways. The process includes collecting and classifying data, adjusting and identifying with literature or supporting theories, discussing theoretical data analysis based on research findings, and drawing conclusions based on the data. The object of this research is a series entitled *You* which contains dialogues to analyze problems. Then, the researcher used observation techniques and documentation to collect data. The observation technique will be used to observe the script in the *You* series scene to show the male gaze by watching and understanding the series,

and elaborate the script to male gaze theory.

The exploitation of the male gaze in *You* series demonstrates how the romance thriller sub-genre has become commercialized. The story is told mostly from Joe's point of view, objectifying and making female characters become objects of his desire. In order to appeal to a broad audience, the series distinguishes itself by combining romance and thriller aspects. In sequences where Joe's voyeuristic gaze is prominent, this commodification is emphasized, underscoring scopophilia pleasure. However, *You* series also critiques this gaze by showcasing the destructive consequences of Joe's obsession. The combination of romance and thriller produces a complex nuanced story and commodifies the romance thriller subgenre.

Furthermore, examining these elements through Mulvey's theory, this research can see how *You* series navigates the tension between marketable entertainment and cultural critique. Based on the discussion above, concern, and interest, this research finds out how the *You* series combines elements of the romance thriller genre to attract audiences through the

lens of the male gaze. This analysis demonstrates how *You* used the male gaze to commodify romance and thriller elements, appealing to the audience while simultaneously offering a critical perspective on the implications of such a gaze in modern culture. Moreover, the aim of this research is to analyse the *You* series to help reveal that this series challenges patriarchal views and gender representation in the media.

The globalization has changed the way humans consume and distribute media, allowing content to spread to different countries quickly. Netflix is one of the platforms that takes advantage of globalization to distribute content to a global audience. Considering the object of this research a *You* series, a combination of romance thriller genres, to examine this phenomenon. This research uses the transnational perspective of Arjun Appadurai who introduced the concept of scapes in "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization." (1996). Appadurai explains how these "scapes" interact and shape human experiences and identities in the context of dynamic globalization. The concept of "scapes" emphasizes

the fluidity, tension, and complexity of global flows that influence how we see the world and interact with each other (Appadurai, 1996). These concepts include mediascapes, ethoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes to examine the commodification of romance thriller.

DISCUSSION

You series is an interesting issue of how romance and thriller themes may be combined to commercialize hybrid genres and appeal to a broad audience. The script of the show is built around the masculine gaze, which objectifies female characters and puts viewers in Joe's shoes. While this style allows for moments of transgression that give the characters more depth, it also reinforces established gender stereotypes. The popularity of the show proves that hybrid genres may be profitable, especially when they appeal to gender norms and pre-existing watching tastes. But it also emphasizes how difficult it continues to be to produce media that offers genuinely progressive gender depictions and completely breaks free from the constraints of the male gaze.

Joe Goldberg and Female Characters

Romantic thriller storylines often revolve around male protagonists, with female characters playing the role of female characters playing secondary characters whose main function is to support the male hero's journey. This script focus reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates the idea that women's worth lies in their relationships with men (Traesar & Sujiwa, 2025). In the *You* series, the male protagonist is Joe Goldberg, played by Penn Badgley. Joe is a smart bookstore manager and obsessed with women who are the object of his affection and often dangerous. The following is an explanation of Joe's relationship with some of the main female characters in the series.

The first female character is Beck in season 1. Back is an aspiring writer and the first object of Joe's obsession. Their relationship begins romantically but soon turns toxic. Joe spied on Beck, controlling aspects of his life, and eventually killed people he considered a threat to their relationship. Although Beck is initially attracted to Joe, she eventually realizes his dark side and tries to escape, but ends tragically with Joe's murderous death.

The second is Love in Seasons 2 and 3, Love is a chef who also has a dark side, similar to Joe. Their relationship begins with a deep and intense love but quickly turns into a relationship full of manipulation and violence. Love, like Joe, has the ability to commit violence for love's sake, including killing people who are perceived as threats. Their relationship became increasingly complicated after getting married and having a child. Although there are moments of happiness, instability, and dark secrets, each makes their relationship fragile and eventually leads to destruction.

Third is Candace Stone in Seasons 1 and 2, Candace is Joe's ex-girlfriend who he thought was dead but turned out to be alive. Candace returns to Joe's life with the goal of revenge and uncovering the truth about him. Their relationship is full of tension and conflict, as Candace tries to stop Joe and warn people about the danger he poses.

Joe's relationship with these female characters shows a dangerous pattern of

obsessive and possessive behavior. Joe often sees himself as a savior or protector, but his actions actually show the nature of control and violence that destroys the lives of those around him. Joe's obsession with love leads him to commit horrific actions, showing that behind his calm and intelligent outward appearance, there is a dangerous psychopathic trait.

The Narration in *You* Series Strengthen the Male Gaze Concept

The theory of the Male Gaze is taken from Laura Mulvey's essay entitled Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema in 1975. It is a critical concept that explores the patriarchal perspective in the representation of women in film and media. According to Mulvey, the cinematic perspective often represents women from the perspective of heterosexual men, which objectifies and functions women as sexual objects for men's visual satisfaction. In this theory, borrowing some psychoanalytic concepts from Sigmund Freud, such as scopophilia, and from Jacques Lacan, such as the mirror phase, Mulvey argues that patriarchal ideology is the dominant order in society and in Hollywood cinema narrative films. In the past and present era, it is often depicted that the image and presence of female characters in films as passive characters and sexual objects for heterosexual men. This is found in narratives and in formal elements of films. In her essay, Laura Mulvey introduced the theory of Male Gaze, which questions how women are viewed for pleasure based on social structures that are active (male) and passive (female).

Components of the Male Gaze theory (Mulvey, 1975) explain scopophilia is the pleasure obtained from seeing, especially in a voyeuristic form. There are some situations where the source of pleasure can be found just by looking, and vice versa. Freud, in Three Essays on Sexuality (1905), distinguishes scopophilia as one of the components of sexual narcissism that exists as an impulse that is not bound to the erotogenic zone. He interpreted scopophilia as the objectivity of other humans, putting them under curious and controlling gazes. First, Narcissistic Identification is the identification of the audience with the male protagonist, often leading to a perspective that objectifies the female character. Second,

Objectification is when women are portrayed as objects of male desire and also portrayed in a way that emphasizes physical appearance over dept and personal agency.

The concept of the Male Gaze extends from film to any media, women are portrayed as an interesting experience in the real world. The body of the woman is used to sell and attract the attention of heterosexual men. Advertisements, magazine covers, and women's social media are more often displayed. In addition, in the world of literacy, there are still many male writers who describe women as objects in their books and mostly as sexual objects. Furthermore, the Male Gaze usually makes women be shown in two levels of eroticism, namely as erotic objects for actors in the film or erotic objects for male viewers. The plot is displayed by depicting women as objects seen by men through the camera movement, which is then forwarded to the audience.

Such visualization creates a more dominant male role by displaying women as passive objects. Thus, the Male Gaze has two main components, namely women as the object of the Male Gaze and the audience, who are finally required to be able to adapt to the male character. She argued that mainstream cinema often portrays women from a heterosexual male perspective, objectifying them and relegating them to passive roles. The male gaze involves three perspectives, namely the perspective of the male character within the narrative, the perspective of the audience, assumed to be male, and the perspective of the camera, controlled by male filmmakers.

In the world of film, most men become filmmakers. Men make films that are targeted at men as well. Therefore, most films usually make men the main role in the story while women are the only characters who are given limited functions to serve or achieve the goals of the male protagonist. Typical examples of the application of the Male Gaze in the film include close-up shots of women who follow the direction of men's eye movements in exploring the female body, moving shots, and finally fixating on the body of the woman and so on.

This series uses camera perspectives and narratives to reinforce the concept of the male gaze, which is the view of men who view women as objects. Here are a few ways the series illustrates the concept of male gaze. Most

episodes are accompanied by a voice narration from Joe Goldberg, which gives the audience direct access to his thoughts. The dialogue below is a finding in Joe's point of view.

> Joe : Here's what I Learned this week. You are special. You're talented. You're passionate. You're smart. Except in the ways you are really not. Like not locking your phone. And falling for men like Benji. You know better, but you can't stop. Because, well, because everyone needs someone. What you really need is someone to save you. I can help, Beck. Let me help you. (*You* Series Season 1 Eps 1 [40:02 - 40:16]

This script often shows how Joe views and judges the women around him. The script frame the audience's view of the female characters, as the audience hears Joe's interpretation of them before the audience actually sees them develop as individuals. Joe's perspective is often manipulative and distorts reality, making him sound like a caring and compassionate person.

> Joe : It's the last thing we ever did together. In the end, you couldn't love me. I

feel at peace with that now, because I loved you. the absolute best that I could. And I gave you what you wanted. I helped you become the writer you so wanted to be. It's sad you're not here to see it. But I know you would be so happy. (*You* Series Season 1 Eps 10 [45:14 - 45:50])

Joe's voice increasingly puts the audience into his mind in making plans or describing whatever is thinking. So that this involvement builds a strong relationship between the audience and the series.

Intense observation where the camera often follows the direction of Joe's gaze, showing how he spies and observes women. This creates a voyeuristic experience for the audience, where the audience is positioned as a secret keeper, like Joe.

> Joe : You can't afford new clothes, but let's be real, you'd look perfect in a potato sack. Not a criticism, God knows I am, too, but you seem distracted. Of course, a new phone. Not sure how you went 24 hours without one. As you active your new friend there, I know you think you're also deactivating your old

one. But here's where you're wrong. Your old phone, which I have, is still logged into the cloud. And that means I'm still logged into you. sci-fi movies are so wrong. Technology is our friend. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 2 [01:56 – 02:36])

The camera often picks up Joe's point of view, giving the viewer access to Joe's voyeuristic view of Beck. The script above is an sample of a scene where Joe walks Beck through a window and follows his every move on social media. The camera presents Beck in very personal and vulnerable moments, all of which are without the knowledge or approval of the female character. The series further uses close-ups of women's faces or bodies from Joe's point of view, reinforcing the idea that they are seen as objects. This shot not only shows their physical beauty but also how Joe sees their every move and expression. From the data above, the close-up was taken when Joe was outside Beck's house to spy on his every move.

The main characters such as Beck and Love, are often portrayed through Joe's idealistic and romantic views,

which then turn into possessive and controlling.

Joe : The point, Beck … love is, uh, tricky. A guy needs to protect himself. I had to be sure you're safe. Your name was a glorious place to start. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 1 [06:41 – 07:13])

Joe finished some peanut butter and saltines out of a sleeve. He sits in front of an elderly MacBook. On the screen and search box, Joe types in Guinevere Beck. Joe scrolls on Beck's social media to looking for privacy information about her.

Joe : There you were. Every account set to public. you want to be seen. Heart. Known. Of course, I obliged. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 1 [07:18 – 07:15])

This shows how they are seen not as individuals of their own wants and needs but as objects that Joe must own and control. In addition, Joe uses his observations and knowledge of the lives of these women to control them. He tracks their social media, stalks them, and manages situations so that they feel they need or depend on him. The visual objectification that Beck is often shown through close-ups that highlight his physical appeal, according to how Joe sees and

wants it. The camera captures Beck by focusing attention on his body, not on his individual or personality. According to Liza's understanding from Mass Media Representation of Gendered Violence, she said the ways in which male power and masculinity are associated with violence in a variety of interpersonal contexts, including sexual interactions, have been especially problematic in mainstream mass media.(Carter et al., 2014). Mass media images that present violence as a normal part of sex, blur the lines between consent and rape, or show an intimate encounter as starting with force and ending with mutual desire, encourage viewers to believe that women are desirous of sexual violation and that men are incapable of providing non-violent intimacy. These kinds of portrayals are widespread and can be found in a wide range of media and genres.

While clearly committing criminal and manipulative acts, the narrative and camera often make us see the world from Joe's point of view. This creates moral ambiguity where the audience is forced to feel empathy or at least understanding towards Joe, even if his behavior is unjustified.

Joe : Another person I failed to help. I thought I could better myself for you. I couldn't. I tried to be the perfect boyfriend, the perfect friend to your friends, and it wasn't enough. So, to hell with it. It's freeing in a way to know so definitively where I stand. Where you stand. To know for certain what I have to do to protect you. and just like that, everything clicks into place. My feet. Runner's high. It is pretty great. And I remember this is why I took up jogging. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 5 [40:31 – 41:13])

By positioning the audience through Joe's point of view, visually and narratively, *You* series invites the audience to see the world through the lens of a male gaze.

Joe : Oh. She's dead. of course, she's dead. She fell. That's right she fell. An accident. Happens all the time. She was running and she fell. Into a rock. Over and over again. Okay, let's be real, she was attacked. Someone attacked her. But maybe they had a good reason, right? You ever think of that, Detective? Shit! Detective are real. And DNA is a

thing and I just hit that girl with a rock. God, the sound. I would never hurt a woman. But she was a dangerous flesh-hungry harpy. She forced my hand. That's on her and her family for screwing her up. I had to, Beck. I had to. I knew you'd never forgive me, but she gave me no choice. I'm not a bad person. She was going to ruin you. but you're safe now. Thanks to me. I just want you to live your best life. It's brave, what I do for you. it's not easy. It's hard. Sometimes it makes me sick. I'm brave. How many guys will do anything for the person they love? Honestly, Beck. You're lucky to have me. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 5 [41:35 – 42:26])

It effectively shows how possessive views and objectivity can occur while also criticizing and exposing the destructive impact of those views. The series opens up a discussion of how narrative and visuals can be used to reinforce or challenge gender and power stereotypes.

Exposure to Gender Violence

The romantic and suspense aspects of the *You* series genre are used to criticize gender stereotypes. The *You*

series uses romantic and suspense aspects to critique gender stereotypes, highlighting the power dynamics and dangerous behaviors that are hidden behind romantic relationships. As discussed above, illustrates the difference between true love and obsession. Joe Goldberg claims that his actions are driven by love, but his statement is a form of toxic and possessive obsession. This criticizes the stereotype that extreme actions in the name of love are romantic or justified. Likewise, in the Narration of the Patient Man, Joe is often described as a patient and caring man who only wants to protect the woman he loves. However, his actions show that this spreading and protective nature is often used to spread manipulative and controlling intentions. The series criticizes the idea that a man who seems perfect on the outside can have very dark intentions on the inside.

This research captures a clue that with the narrative of tension in the story series, tension is a criticism of heterosexual stereotypes. The very clear part is about control and domination, control and domination, where tension often stems from Joe's actions to control the lives

of the women he loves. The use of technology and surveillance shows how men can use their power to control and intimidate women, criticizing gender stereotypes about who is in control in relationships. At this point, it can be found in the dialogue between Beck and Joe in the last episode of the series.

> Joe : Wait, wait, wait, please wait. I know you're angry. I know.
> Beck : You have no idea what I am, you fucking psychopath.
> Joe : I knew it was too good to be true.
> Beck : What, I all the nice things I said to you while I was locked in a cage? You actually believe that all of this is somehow justified.
> Joe : It is.
> Beck : You are insane. You think that you did some bad shit and that I did some bad shit and that this is equivalent? Yeah, I lied. I cheated. But didn't stalk you, I didn't hit you. I didn't kill people. I didn't do any of this!
> Joe : There's not all line in the world that I wouldn't cross for you.
> Beck : I didn't ask you to swoop in for me.
> Joe : But you did. Your life was a mess.

> Beck : Yes, but it was my life. And I didn't need some sociopath on a white horse to clean house. I mean, what gives you the right? You thought that I would be grateful? You … You are him. You are the bad thing. You are the thing that you should have killed.
> Joe : If you let me out, we can just talk.
> Beck : You know what I think? I think that this was all just an excuse. An excuse to justify creeping into girls' lives and violating the shit out of them. I think you love it. The power. You love it…!
> Joe : No, I don't.
> Beck : I think that this … this was the perfect excuse to take put people like Benji and Peach, who've always looked down on you and your whole miserable life. But you … You are not special. You're broken. I could never love you. Rot in here, you psychotic asshole. You're gonna spend the rest of your life in jail. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 10 [39:30 – 41:31])

The fake security part is creating tension by showing how women feel safe around Joe, only to determine that he is their biggest threat. This

criticizes the stereotype that men who seem trustworthy and kind always have good intentions. Violence is carried out to overcome what male characters perceive as dangerous or a barrier to their relationship. Although the intention was to protect, this action actually created great danger. The implication is that Joe tries to control aspects of women's lives under the pretext of protecting them from harm. This includes deciding who they can be sectarian with and what they do, which slowly erodes women's freedom and autonomy.

The thriller elements in the *You* series play an important role in reinforcing gender-related messages. The psychological tension built through Joe's action to manipulate and control those around him, especially women, shows the power dynamics in the relationship. Joe's action of monitoring, stalking, and controlling the lives of the women he loves reflects how men can use their power to oppress and control women. The stalking aspect is a major thriller element in *You* series that highlights the fears and insecurities that many women experience in real life. The series shows how Joe's seemingly loving actions are actually a highly invasive and dangerous form of control.

The thriller element also arises from Joe's internal conflict between his image as an ideal protector and lover and the reality of his cruel and obsessive actions. It criticizes gender stereotypes about men as true protectors, showing how protection can turn into dominance. In his extreme, Joe commits the murder with the aim of protecting Beck. This is a critique of the traditional concept of masculinity that often associates violence with protection. In addition, Joe often appears to be a good and caring man on the surface, but underneath him are manipulative and dangerous qualities. These elements show how a seemingly good man can be a threat to women always comes from a clear and easily recognizable source.

The plot twists in the *You* series often expose the dark side of the characters, including women like Love, who have a dark side and the ability to commit violence. It criticizes the stereotype that women are always passive victims in thriller stories by showing that they can also have power. Then, the thriller element creates moral uncertainty, where the audience is forced to question

the character's actions and motivations. For example, even though the audience sees Joe as the protagonist, his cruel and manipulative actions force the audience to question sympathy for Joe.

The issue in this series is related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a form of violence or abuse that occurs between individuals who are or have been involved in romantic or intimate relationships, such as girlfriends, life partners, or husband and wife. This violence can include various forms, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic (Violence, 2018). IPV can occur in heterosexual relationships as well as same-sex relationships and can affect individuals of all ages, races, backgrounds, and social status.

Rigid gender roles, this series shows that traditional gender roles can facilitate and justify control behavior. Joe feels entitled to control Beck because he sees himself as his protector. It criticizes the view that women need to be protected by men by depriving women of their freedom and autonomy. First, violence and abuse, this series shows the physical and psychological violence experienced by women at the hands of Joe. This violence adds to the tension but also highlights the issues of gender violence and how power can be abused in intimate relationships. Second, reaction and resistance, the thriller element also pays attention to how the women reacts and fights against this violence. Beck and Love, they showed different ways to fight and defend, even though they were often in vulnerable positions.

Related to the issues in this series, there is coercive control which is a form of violence in intimate relationships that involves a series of actions that aim to dominate, control, and regulate the behavior and freedom of the victim (Stark, 2012). This tactic does not always involve physical violence but can be just as or more damaging to the mental and emotional well-being of the victim. Coercive control is often difficult to recognize because it appears in a subtle form and is often mistaken for concern or protection by behavior.

Penn Badgley as a main character had an interview to discuss IPV in *You* series. "Penn Badgley may play a murderous psychopath in Netflix's "You," but in real-life, he's an outspoken

advocate against gender-based violence. The role has also drawn controversy, as Badgley himself has warned viewers not to normalize or overlook Joe's behavior. Yet Badgley has also said he hopes the role can present an opportunity to openly discuss and probe gender-based violence." (Aviles, 2020). The news contained an interview with Penn Badgley also discussed the role of gender and social media in gender-based violence through *You* series. Thus, the *You* series is not only an entertaining psychological thriller but also a critique of certain dynamics in heterosexual relationships. Through the issues, it explores the traditional concept that men should protect women, often in an exaggerated and unhealthy way.

The key principles of sound and image interaction in film are established, and they include: harmony or intensification of the interaction between the recipients' perception of the inner sense and their own, mutual reinforcement and counterpoint between sound and visual components in film drama, consistency and logic in the development of the storyline and unfolding of the concept of the film. According to (Kharchenko, 2020), the

following are the main purposes of music in film: controlling emotions; enhancing artistic communication; establishing intertextuality within the work; providing "background" support for the primary plot line; and integrating the other elements of the screenplay's structure, such as the plotline.

The illustrative, contrast, synchronous, communicative, and structural basic models of how music interacts with a story function in a movie. The fundamental ideas and purposes of music in contemporary film, which have been influenced by advancements in technology and creative practice, are supported. Certain models of the interplay between sound and visuals on screen are determined by the functions of music in movies. The dark cinematographic techniques and the close framing of the face or Joe's actions reinforce feelings of terror and fear, highlighting women being objects of surveillance and violence. Similarly, the music used often adds tension and discomfort, reinforcing the message that behind the word romantic, there is a real and dangerous threat. By combining these elements of thriller, the *You* series not only creates an engaging and

suspenseful story but also sends a powerful message about gender dynamics, power, and violence. This series invites the audience to question and criticize gender stereotypes that are often taken for granted in romantic relationships and society in general.

The *You* series stands out as one of the clearest sample of the interaction between the commodification of the romance thriller genre and the male gaze theory in today's popular culture. Told through the perspective of Joe, a handsome but obsessive and manipulative bookstore manager. The series combines elements of romance and thriller in a scary way and invites a crisis reflection on how people consume love stories in the media. Genre commodification is the process by which elements of a genre are taken and adapted to maximize commercial appeal. In the context of *You*, it means taking elements from both romance and thriller genres to create a story that appeals to researcher who want the emotional tension of a love story.

In *You* series, Joe's act of stalking and controlling women is framed as a form of deep love. This narrative clearly embeds his actions in a romantic context, even though it is actually terrifying. So that the audience is interested and continues to watch, this is an example of commodification, where the scary elements of thrillers are romanticized to attract audiences who enjoy the genre. Additionally, the series emphasizes the high emotional tension in the relationship between Joe and his target. The mixture of feelings of attraction and fear is a hallmark of the romance thriller genre, and this commodification increases the emotional involvement of the audience in the fate of these characters. Joe is portrayed as a charismatic character and, at the same time, very morally flawed. This approach creates an additional layer of plot and characterization, making the series even more engaging and engaging for viewers. Gluing is not just watching a villain. They are watching someone they can understand, even if his actions are unjustifiable.

In relation to the above, the theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey refers to the way in which the media often represents the world and characters from the perspective of heterosexual men, who objectify and judge women based on their physical

attractiveness and ability to satisfy men's desires. In the *You* series, this theory is very evident in how the narrative and plot development are influenced from a male point of view. The woman in *You* series is often positioned as an object to be seen and judged based on Joe's wants and needs. They became. The center of Joe's obsession is not because of their individuality but how they are seen by Joe. This is a direct manifestation of the male gaze, where women are made the object of men's gaze.

The narrative of *You* series is controlled and mostly told from the point of view of Joe, who strengthens the Male Gaze. The audience sees the world through her eyes, often deducing the more complicated reality of the female characters. This perspective leads the audience to understand, and even in the middle of the story the audience can sympathize with Joe's actions. Thus, Male Gaze influences how the plot develops, especially in the way the relationship between Joe and the woman is built and destroyed. The focus on Joe's desires and perspectives directs the development of a plot that sacrifices a deeper characterization of women.

The interaction between genre commodification and male gaze creates a narrative that makes the viewer feel torn between sympathizing with Joe and horrifying his actions. This creates a consistent tension in the plot, forcing the viewer to keep watching to see how the story will unfold. The series also criticizes real phenomena such as stalking, relationship violence, and surveillance. There is a critical aspect of social issues, so by highlighting the extremities of Joe's behavior through the lens of Male Gaze from the commodification thriller series, this thriller series invites the audience to question the normalization and romanticization of the act in popular culture.

Overall, the commodification of the romance thriller genre and the male gaze theory in the You series creates an interesting narrative and critiques relevant social issues. The series is not just a series of stories about love and obsession, but also a reflection of how viewers view and consume the series in popular culture. The result of combining romance thrillers in one story was successfully enjoyed by all viewers. The large number of viewers'

interests adds to the correlation that many viewers associate themselves with issues of relationships and violence.

CONCLUSION

The success of the romance thriller series with social issues regarding love and tension has made many viewers interested in watching. The *You* series airs on Netflix, a major streaming platform that can reach a global audience. So, the audience is often invited to see the world through Joe's perspective. The audience was placed in the position of an active observer identified by Laura Mulvey.

Through the Male Gaze theory, the *You* series on Netflix can be seen as a commodification representation of the romance thriller genre that reinforces and criticizes the dynamics of gender power in popular culture. The female characters in the *You* series are objectified and controlled through the perspective of the male protagonist. The narrative is built from Joe Goldberg's point of view, influencing the audience to understand and judge female characters in the form of sexualization and control.

Thus, the *You* series encourages viewers to re-evaluate the traditional concept of protection in relationships. Through this narrative, it reminds the audience of the importance of equality, respect, and freedom in every relationship, as well as rigid and manipulative gender roles.

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Barriers to Civil Rights: Analyzing the Racial Discrimination Portrayed in Ava DuVernay's *Selma*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author wants to examine the racial discrimination experienced by Black people in the *Selma* movie and analyze the struggles of Martin Luther King Jr. against the inequality of African American rights. In this research, the author used a qualitative method through library research. The *Selma* movie's pictures and conversation are used as the study's primary source of data for analysis, and this research also relies on secondary data by examining academic articles, books, internet sources, and other readings related to the research topic. The author applied a post-nationalist perspective, Talcott Parsons' structure of functionalism and race discrimination theory. The result of this research is that four types of racial discrimination were identified: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimization, all perpetrated by the white race against the black race. Furthermore, Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle can be understood through Parsons's four structures of functionalism: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latent pattern maintenance.

Keywords: *martin luther king jr; movie; racial discrimination; selma; struggle*

INTRODUCTION

According to Wackerman (1990), the term "race" was used to differentiate populations in various regions based on physical traits that had evolved, such as skin

color, facial features, and other traits. This indicates that the term "race" is used to distinguish individuals in a distinct location according to traits that are commonly formed, such as skin color, physical appearance, and beyond. When someone perceives or identifies as African-American or another racial group, regardless of their physical attributes or other traits, such classification creates a social reality that may have tangible and long-lasting effects. Therefore, it may be said that racial classification might lead to presumptions and beliefs about the individuals in the category. Consequently, regardless of physical or distinguishing features, individuals will identify as African American, Chinese, or Latino (Citro et al., 2007, p. 27).

Globally, social disparity is already becoming an issue. Therefore, locations with social and cultural diversity may also have societal disparities. One of the reasons for the socioeconomic disparities that exist is racism, which has long been a pressing issue. Similar to the United States, this topic has occurred globally. Racial racism primarily occurred between whites and Blacks in the United States. Racism is defined as "the action, practice, or belief that human beings are divided according to their races" by Smedley & Audrey (2024). Additionally, there is a causal relationship between mental qualities and inherited physical characteristics that led to some races being treated differently due to their superiority complex. Racism between whites and Blacks is primarily caused by white people's superiority complex toward African American Blacks. Stereotyping, bigotry, and discrimination against Black people are fueled by white people's sense of superiority (Rahmatillah et al., 2020; Smedley & Audrey, 2024).

Around 1619, slavery in the American colonies marked the beginning of racial discrimination in the US. Slavery expanded throughout the American colonies after a Dutch ship landed 20 Africans ashore at the English outpost of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. According to some historians, between 6 and 7 million slaves were transported to the New World in the 18th century alone. After the American Revolution, many Americans began to compare the oppression of Africans held in slavery to their mistreatment by the British. North Americans

finally condemned slavery. Consequently, from 1861 to 1865, a civil war broke out between the United States and the 11 Southern states that broke away from the Union to become the Confederate States of America, which claimed countless lives (Weber et al., 2025).

When it comes to voting rights in the US, some people indeed find it difficult or impossible to exercise their right to vote. Just 6% of the Black population in the northern states of Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont could exercise their right to vote before freedom. White people were exempt from the $250 owning property and ballot payment requirement in New York. African Americans worked as slaves in the South, and white people restricted their ability to vote (Salvatore et al., 2007, p. 4). Although Johnson refused to be convinced, a Democrat from Tennessee who opposed slavery did not lack moral consideration for African Americans; rather, he had a very vague and racist opinion about the citizenship skills of African Americans on the lands where poor whites were presumed to be subjugated by elite farmers. Giving up the permit to Black people would have a "great impact on the white as well as the colored man", he told Douglass. As "illogical and prejudicial", he rejected the chief executive's opinion (Salvatore et al., 2007, p. 5).

Beginning in the middle of the 1950s, civil rights activist and Baptist clergyman Martin Luther King Jr. had a profound effect on racial relations in the US. King had a younger brother named Alfred Daniel Williams King and an older sister named Willie Christine. The King's children were raised in a loving and safe home. Martin Sr. was more of a disciplinarian, but his wife's kindness readily counterbalanced his father's severe methods. King met Coretta Scott, a budding singer and musician at Boston's New England Conservatory School, where he was pursuing his PhD. After getting married in June 1953, they had four kids: Bernice, Dexter Scott, Martin Luther King III, and Yolanda. King led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), among other endeavors. In addition to helping to create the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he was instrumental in ending the legal segregation of African American people in the US through his advocacy and motivational speeches. Among many other accolades, King was

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. One of the most significant and inspirational African-American leaders in history, he is still remembered today (Biography.com Editors, 2025; Nimtz, 2016; Ward & Badger, 1996).

The movies also touch on issues of race and discrimination that occur in social settings. *Selma* is one of them. The film covers the story of Martin Luther King, a well-known African American activist who was successful in eradicating racism, discrimination, and segregation and denying Black people the opportunity to vote. In Alabama, the story starts in Selma. During that tenure, they experienced racial discrimination when casting their ballots. Martin Luther King was requested to assist them in obtaining the right to vote. There were a lot of issues in the past that were related to skin color; Black men were constantly subjected to prejudice, expulsion, and discrimination by society just because of their dark skin. In the Selma Administration Office, Annie Lee Cooper, a Black woman, attempts to register but is rejected by the white registration clerk. On the day of March, Jimmie Lee Jackson stood up for his grandfather after he was kicked by Sheriff Clark. Sheriff Clark was also beaten by Bonyton, and like the other protesters, she was later imprisoned. Martin traveled to the White House after so many victims and requested President Johnson to grant them the right to vote, but he continued to postpone it with Governor George Wallace. Black Americans were then granted the right to vote by President Johnson. Until his assassination in 1968, Martin Luther King led the American Civil Rights movement for 13 years with the nonviolent protest theory and practice (Arney, 2017; Henton, 2022).

In this study, the author reviews several other studies related to this research. Reviewing the existing literature, the author aims to highlight the gaps and limitations in current knowledge. This aims to avoid plagiarism and to prove that no one has ever taken this topic. First, Kurniawan and Puspitasari (2022), their paper intends to describe and explain racial discrimination and the anti-racial discrimination movement against black people in the film Selma (2014) by Ava Duvernay. The approach used in their paper is Roland Barthes' semiotics with audio and visual sign analysis units.

Second, Rahmatillah et al. (2020), the purpose of their

research is to find the level of racism that happened to African Americans as seen in *Selma*. Further, the other purpose is to give the reflection on the effect of racism toward African-American people as depicted in the movie. Their research focused on examining racism by using Jones' and Day's theory about the level of racism and how the effect of racism itself. Further, they used the qualitative-descriptive method and Mikos' data analysis for the movie.

Third, Ruata et al. (2021), the purpose of their research is to find out about the kinds of racism and the way Afro-American people struggle against racism in *Selma* using racism theory. Furthermore, the data were generated from the script, dialogues, and the scenes in the movie. Fourth, Asrita et al. (2023), the purpose of their study is to answer how signifier and signified are displayed in the movie *Till* and what are the representations of racism contained in the movie. The data studied is in the form of pieces of images, sounds, text, or sounds contained in the movie. Their study is using Saussure's semiotics. It will help analyze media texts with a set of signs that have various meanings. Fifth, Nurhadi and Assidiqi (2019), the method used in their research is the sociology of literature because it is appropriate to analyze literary work focusing on the racist attitude in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* movie script. The grand theory for the topic is taken from *Racism: A Short History* by George M. Fredrickson and Stereotype as Explanations by Craig McGarty.

Based on the previous research above, the author decided that this research aims to examine the racial discrimination experienced by Black people in the Selma movie and analyze the struggles of Martin Luther King Jr. against the inequality of African American rights. Because no one has discussed this yet. So, the author will use it in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis is conducted through the lens of a post-nationalist perspective, which reinterprets American identity by highlighting the voices of minority and marginalized groups. According to Rowe (2000), American identity must be reconsidered in a global context, incorporating the experiences of ethnic minorities, African Americans, women, and other marginalized communities. This approach challenges dominant narratives

that center on white American norms and instead foregrounds alternative perspectives in understanding national identity and social struggle.

To analyze the social dynamics and King's activism within the movie, the study employs Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism. Parsons' theory views society as an interdependent system that must fulfill four functional imperatives to maintain stability:

1. Adaptation: how a system adapts to its environment.
2. Goal Attainment: the capacity to define and achieve collective goals.
3. Integration: the coordination of the system's various components.
4. Latent Pattern Maintenance: the reinforcement of cultural values and norms.

By applying this theory, the author interprets Martin Luther King Jr.'s role as a stabilizing agent within a society undergoing racial and political turmoil, focusing on how his actions addressed systemic imbalances and led to social transformation.

In addition, the study uses race discrimination theory, which examines how racial bias and structural inequalities are embedded within institutions and social behavior. This theory is essential for identifying the different forms of racial discrimination depicted in the movie, including direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimization, and understanding their socio-political roots and consequences.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the author describes the purpose of the objectives of the study. This research consists of two objectives: the first is to determine what types of racial discrimination Black people experience in the *Selma* movie and the struggle of Martin Luther King Jr. against the inequality of African American rights.

The Types of Racial Discrimination Experienced by Black People in *Selma*

Novels, music, and dramas are all examples of popular culture, and so are movies, which affect viewers emotionally, are grounded, well-liked, and may help highlight crucial themes like the importance of inclusivity and diversity, being an opportunity to discuss how the movie depicts different racial groupings (Bozdech, 2023). Therefore, the author

emphasizes discussing Ava DuVernay's *Selma*, which depicts how white people discriminate against black people.

Racism stems from "an ideology of racial domination" (Wilson, 1999, p. 14), in which one or more racial groups define or justify the inferior treatment or social positions of other ethnic groups by claiming biological or cultural superiority. 25 ways of differentiating between groups of people based on patterns of perception of physical distinctions, such as skin color or eye shape, are classified as "racial" due to racial discrimination (see section Racism as a Social Process). Racialization becomes racism when racial groups are evaluated in a hierarchical and socially significant way (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 857).

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) established broad and specific definitions of "racial discrimination" in 1965. "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, ethnicity, or nationality" is one definition of racial discrimination. To undermine or hinder the enjoyment or exercise of equality in human rights and fundamental freedoms in any area of public life, whether it be political, economic, social, cultural, or otherwise (Bradley, 2019, p. 18).

Racial inequality in social outcomes can be attributed to both simple acts of racial discrimination and the intricate web of social ties. Beneficial direct and indirect discrimination have been separated by social scientists; the former happens where disparities emerge and is frequently deliberate. When decisions are influenced by the unequal results of direct discrimination, the indirect model emerges. It prolongs the initial injury and keeps it going (Pettigrew & Taylor, 2015, pp. 1-2). Many people believe that racial prejudice is a psychological issue rather than a systemic one. It held that racial injustice will be purposefully caused by prejudiced members of the dominant race. However, the prevalent racial prejudice in society is reflected in the fact that white American workers nominated their white friends for positions (Pettigrew & Taylor, 2015, p. 5). Racism has a terrible, morally repugnant, and inhuman aspect. Racism is a worldwide instrument of subjugation. Dehumanizing a community is how it operates. It functions based

on a kind of artificial race intended to divide individuals into a hierarchy intended to permanently elevate some and subjugate millions, in addition to rejecting their innate equality and dignity (Bradley, 2019, pp. 7-8).

Direct Discrimination

Figure 1. Annie Lee Cooper is denied voter registration and mocked by a white clerk (06:55)

> Receptionist : "How many judges are there in the city of Alabama?"
> Annie : "(BREATHES DEEPLY) 67."
> Receptionist : "Name them!"

When Annie Lee Cooper (a black woman) goes to submit her file to register to vote, she gets treated badly and given questions that do not make sense by a white receptionist and he also does not allow Annie Lee Cooper register to vote. With the pictures and dialogue above, the author can categorize it as direct discrimination.

When "one person is treated less favorably than another is, has been, or would be treated in a comparable scenario",

direct discrimination is taking place. Article 1 of Act 67/2006 on Discrimination Against Disabled People in Fields Outside of Employment provides an identical term (Cachón, 2013, p. 26). Feagin (1986) directly determines institutional discrimination as "actions defined by a given organization or community that have a deliberate and negative impact on members of the subordinate group" (p. 30). The Australian Human Rights Commission defines direct discrimination as when someone treats another person less favorably because of their race, color, ancestry, national origin, ethnicity, or immigration status (Racial Discrimination, n.d.).

Indirect discrimination

Figure 2. A building in the city of Selma, Alabama that only serves white people since 1855 (14:39)

Where a hotel in the city of Selma, Alabama has a rule that only serves white people, the rule, of course, had a negative impact on black people and causes injustice and is detrimental to black people. The author can relate it to indirect discrimination

Those who suffer from indirect discrimination accept the notion that white people are superior to black people. Indirect discrimination occurs when "a seemingly neutral regulation, criterion, practice, act, contract, or behavior would place persons [followed by a mention of the specific grounds] at a special disadvantage relative to other persons" (Cachón, 2013, p. 28). Based on Feagin (1986), indirect institutional discrimination is defined as "practices with negative effects and differences that occur to minorities and women, even if the norms or regulations set by the organizations or communities defined by the communities or the rules that guide those actions are established and performed" (p. 31). Under the Australian Human Rights Commission, indirect discrimination may not be as evident. Indirect discrimination may occur when employers or service providers create policies, procedures, or guidelines that seem to treat everyone equally but favor some people over others because of their race, color, ancestry, country or ethnicity, or immigration status. Indirect discrimination may also occur if the terms are unreasonable in light of the circumstances of the case (Racial

Discrimination, n.d.). Based on the City of Toronto, Human Rights Office. A toxic work environment based on race is an indirect form of racial harassment or discrimination. Insulting or inappropriate jokes aimed at racist individuals were found to be toxic to the work environment for employees (Toronto, 2024).

Harassment

Figure 3. Sheriff Clark aggressively pushes elderly Cager Lee, escalating tensions during a peaceful protest (35:20)

Clark : "Sit down, God damn it! (PUSHING THE OLD MAN)"
Jimmie: "Hey, hey! Pa? Pa?"
Viola : "Don't do it."
Clark : "Do you have a problem, boy?"
Jimmie: "I'm sick of this! I just told you"
Clark : "What'd you think, boy? (HIT JIMMIE LEE JACKSON WITH A STICK)"

Image three and the dialogue above, where a white sheriff (Clark) degrades the young black man (Jimmie Lee Jackson) and beats him with a stick. With the attitude or treatment carried out by Sheriff Clark, who is white, towards Jimmie Lee Jackson who is black, the

author can categorize it as harassment. It shows how the example of skin that occurs in society black people is considered lower than white people. Therefore, white people behave arbitrarily towards black people.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, a specific meaning of harassment is behavior that is known or should be known to be unpleasant. Racial harassment occurs when unwanted behavior is related to racial grounds under the Code. Racial harassment means someone is bothered, threatened, or treated unfairly because of their perceived race, color, ancestry, origin, ethnic origin, belief, or nationality. It may also depend on the combination of these attributes. Racial harassment can be attributed to specifics, such as clothing that relates to the background, speaking with an accent, or practicing a certain religion (Racial Harassment, n.d.). The first formal definition of harassment in Italian law is found in the Decrees implementing the 2000 Directives, which states that the undesired behavior must "create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive atmosphere." Had the phrase "humiliating and insulting environment" until it was

addressed in 2008. (Cachón, 2013, p. 31).

Victimization

According to the Equality Act of 2010, victimization occurs when someone is harmed or killed. Supporting someone who has filed a complaint of racial discrimination may potentially result in it (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

Figure 4. Jimmie Lee Jackson is fatally shot by white police officers during a peaceful demonstration (49:11)

Lingo : "Find a reason to send us in there. Let's scare some real sense into them black bastards."
(Later, officers storm into a restaurant and shoot Jimmie in the stomach.)
Viola : "Stop! Leave him be!"
Jimmie : "It's all right… It's gonna be all right."

The victimization was carried out by the white police and planned by the white government, Colonel Al Lingo, and Governor George Corley Wallace, who killed a black young man, Jimmie Lee Jackson. With the pictures and dialogue

above, the author can categorize it as victimization. This form is a system of hierarchy and injustice, mainly characterized by white supremacy where they have preferential treatment, privilege, and power for white people and tend to sacrifice black people.

The victim's open position, their social incapacity and low self-esteem, and their exaggerated use of and confusion with group norms all appear to be groupings and mechanisms that define victims in the development of bullying. According to a poll conducted in Norway (Einarsen et al., 1994), many victims feel they lack resources for living with and accepting themselves, such as low self-esteem, shyness, and a lack of dispute resolution abilities (Zapf et al., 2010, p. 187). According to interviews with American bullies, Brodsky (1976) asserts that many of the victims lack humor. When they encounter well-known teasers, they could feel victimized and bullied, which makes them the target of practical jokes, parodies, or exaggerations that make them the laughingstock of the department. (Zapf et al., 2011, p. 190).

The Struggles of Martin Luther King Jr against the Inequality of African American Rights as Seen in the Movie *Selma*

The author places Selma, Alabama, as a system and inequality of African American rights as a social problem. The struggle of Martin Luther King Jr. against the inequality of African American rights will be analyzed to see how a social system can integrate into this social problem that can make social change. The struggles of Martin Luther King Jr. are reflected in several actions. In addition, the author obtained the data from Ava DuVernay'' *Selma* and various media to be analyzed later to see how his struggles were successful.

Adaptation

The author obtained the data from *Selma* that have scenes and dialogues that can explain adaptation on Structural functionalism. Scene and dialogues when Martin Luther King Jr. meets President Lyndon Baines Johnson are below:

Figure 5. Martin Luther King Jr. meets with President Lyndon B. Johnson to demand voting rights legislation (11:09)

King   : "We both know in the South black voters are kept off the rolls… by systematic intimidation and fear… We want Federal legislation"

Johnson: "This voting thing is just gonna have to wait."

King   : "It can't wait, Mr. President."

When Martin Luther King Jr. demanded federal legislation guaranteeing the equality of black people to President Lyndon Baines Johnson. He struggled to get equality. Image five and the dialogue above, explain that Martin Luther King Jr. carried out the adaptation process when his demands were rejected by President Lyndon Baines Johnson and went straight to Selma, Alabama. He adjusts the inequality rights that African-American experiences which makes a system unbalanced. As stated by Parson on Ritzer (2008), a system performs an adaptation function by adjusting and changing the environment (Ritzer, 2008, p. 121).

Goal Attainment

The purpose of Martin Luther King Jr's efforts taken on the adaptation function is to achieve equality in the inequality of African American rights.

Figure 6. King urges President Johnson to propose new legislation ensuring voting rights for African Americans (58:54)

King   : "Then propose new legislation, sir."

Johnson: "I can't do that this year."

King   : "We deserve your help as citizens of this country."

Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts on demand federal legislation also reflected the goal function in the endeavor to achieve goals. Where Martin Luther King Jr.'s goal in demanding federal legislation is to get equality on inequality of African American rights. The function of goals in structural functionalism, requires which society as a system must have a goal. Kalu (2011, p. 130) also requires people to struggle to move towards this goal.

Integration

The author also found the integration function in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's struggle.

Figure 7. President Johnson announces the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in a national address (01:49:00)

Johnson: "There is no Negro problem. There is only an American problem… This Wednesday, I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate these illegal barriers."

Martin Luther King Jr.'s pursuit of equal rights for African Americans was finally approved by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. This reflects the integration function in structural-functionalism.

Where integration function according to Kalu (2011), is holding the various actors and agency units in line, creating and maintaining solidarity, and devising a fair procedure for sharing the spoils of cooperation Because it draws its emphasis from both the personality and social subsystems, culture is an essential element in the integration process. It contains basic taken-for-granted assumptions and behavioral norms that people and societies can draw upon as initial and unifying building blocks critical in the early

and later phases of institutional and state reconstruction (Kalu, 2011, p. 131).

Latent Pattern Maintenance

After obtaining those three data, the author found data that reflected Martin Luther King Jr's struggle against the inequality of African American rights as seen in *Selma*. Which were included in the latent pattern maintenance function of structural functionalism theory.

Figure 8. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers a victory speech at the Alabama State Capitol following the Selma march (01:56:40)

King : "We heard them say we'd never make it here… But today we stand as Americans… Our freedom will soon be upon us."

The above figure and the dialogue prove Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle to maintain a pattern after the law that close the inequality of African American rights. He is responsible for the laws that have been made on his demand. So, Martin Luther King Jr made a speech and told people that

they would be free soon and very soon. This is a form of pattern Maintenance performed by Martin Luther King Jr. As stated by Wagiyo (2016), a system must be able to maintain balance and continuity in accordance with applicable regulations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, four types of racial discrimination were identified: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimization, all perpetrated by the white race against the black race. Furthermore, Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts to combat racial inequality are analyzed using Talcott Parsons's Structural Functionalism theory, which views society as an interconnected system. Racial inequality disrupts this system, and King's struggle can be understood through Parsons's four structure of functionalism: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latent pattern maintenance. Through activism, policy advocacy, and legal reforms, King contributed to restoring balance and promoting justice in American society. His leadership and the broader Civil Rights Movement played a crucial role in dismantling systemic discrimination and fostering a more equitable society. This study highlights the persistence of racial discrimination and the necessity of collective action to challenge social injustices, emphasizing the enduring impact of King's struggle in shaping civil rights advancements.

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Priyanka Chopra's Hybrid Identity as a Public Figure Seen through Her Instagram Posts

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ABSTRACT

Fans from all across the world have taken notice of Priyanka Chopra as a public figure. Similar to many other celebrities, she regularly posts details about her personal and professional lives on social media. Because of her special place at the intersection of Indian and American society, Chopra's Instagram posts represent her cultural identity. In analyzing how her hybrid identity as Indian and American is portrayed, this study examines her Instagram posts. The discussion, which uses postcolonial theory and the idea of hybrid identity, focuses on posts made between 2018 and 2024 when she married American musician Nick Jonas. According to this study, Chopra has a hybrid identity reflected in her appearances and the cultural events she participates in. She shows how she maintains her Indian roots while embracing American and Western cultural customs through her posts.

Keywords: *hybrid identity; instagram; postcolonial; public figure; Priyanka Chopra*

INTRODUCTION

No matter where individuals live, cultural changes are unavoidable, particularly in a globe that is becoming more interconnected daily. The quick advancement of technology and the ease of access to information have greatly aided in the globalization and recognition of cultures. Because of increased access to Internet media, people can now easily explore and learn about

various societies' traditions and practices. This international interaction promotes a more comprehensive understanding and admiration of cultural diversity. Since every individual is influenced by their cultural background, learning new practices can be a worthwhile experience.

Learning about other cultures broadens our understanding of variety because culture significantly influences how individuals conduct their lives, claims Miftari (2022). Therefore, schools must implement cultural education to help kids and teenagers grow in their ability to appreciate and understand others from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Because of their varied cultural backgrounds, people and communities frequently embrace several cultures. Migration, exposure to various surroundings, and historical issues like colonization can all contribute to this cultural diversity. Moving to a different nation exposes people to new traditions and habits that can shape who they are. Because colonizing nations forced their cultural norms on colonized regions, colonialism had a profound impact on the development of cultural hybridity. People today have diverse cultural backgrounds

and lifestyles as a result. The development of a hybrid identity is one result of this cultural blending.

The diversity of civilizations worldwide pushes people to embrace contemporary ways of life and bridge cultural barriers while preserving aspects of their ancestry. It is common to refer to those who manage and adjust to these mixed cultural experiences as cultural hybrids. As a result, this study examines how a person's hybrid identity shows itself in their daily life. This subject needs to be prioritized since it fosters respect and cultural understanding in a world that is becoming more interconnected daily. Analyzing Priyanka Chopra's hybrid identity provides insightful information about the difficulties of multicultural living and the value of accepting ethnic variety.

Former Miss World 2000, Chopra, is a multi-talented artist and model. After becoming well-known for her roles in several Bollywood films, she furthered her reputation abroad by playing the first South Asian lead character in the American television series ABC's *Quantico*. Along with her entertainment career, Chopra founded the Priyanka Chopra

Foundation for Health and Education to support economically disadvantaged kids. She was recognized for her worldwide impact in 2016 when TIME magazine named her one of the 100 Most Influential People.

Beyond her professional life, Chopra gained much media attention after she married American singer and actor Nick Jonas, who is part of the Jonas Brothers, on December 1, 2018. Chopra has changed significantly from being a Bollywood icon to a well-known person worldwide. While she no longer lives in India regularly, she has houses in Los Angeles, Mumbai, and New York City (Balasubramanian, 2023).

Throughout her cinematic career, Chopra has played a range of parts and been an active member of groups and campaigns supporting women's and children's rights. She manages the challenges of juggling two different cultures as an Indian living in America. Chopra also experiences many lifestyles and perspectives as the spouse of American musician Nick Jonas. Despite these cultural differences, she maintains a strong connection to her heritage, especially in the entertainment industry, where she blends Indian traditional values with international development and styles. Chopra continues incorporating elements of India's rich cultural legacy and strong traditionalism into her personal and professional life.

Authentic India Tours (2021) claims that greetings, family structures, cuisine, religion, temples, festivals, attire, dancing, literature, and language are just a few examples of India's traditions and customs in day-to-day life. In India, it is customary to bow and say "Namaste" when meeting someone, especially an elderly person, to demonstrate respect. Both saying "Hello" or "Goodbye" and welcoming guests are done with this greeting (10 Customs & Traditions in Indian Culture, 2021).

In India, the idea of a family is frequently associated with big, extended households in which all members live together and evenly divide income. Furthermore, arranged marriages are still a common custom in many Indian regions. Women may be viewed as a burden to the family if they decline an arranged marriage in certain regions where they lack the freedom to select their spouses.

India's distinctive and varied culinary culture is strongly tied to its customs;

the nation is well known for its extensive vegetarian cuisine. Although Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism all have significant followings, Hinduism is the most popular religion in India. Indian culture also values spiritual and magical experiences, as seen by the many holy temples that can be found around the nation. Often regarded as tourist attractions, these temples are exclusive to India and draw tourists worldwide.

India has become known for its colorful festivals, a crucial aspect of its culture. Diwali, Holi, Makar Sankranti, Muslim Eid, Baisakhi (Sikhs' harvest festival), and Jains' and Buddhists' festivals are among the most well-known. Christmas and Good Friday are two more important holidays. Food plays a significant role in the celebrations of these festivals, which are usually characterized by parades, music and dancing, religious rites, and vivid colors. Since alcohol is frequently seen as improper in many cultural and religious contexts, it is typically not a part of Indian festivals, in contrast to some Western traditions.

Clothing such as the saree, dothi, gamcha, kaupina, lagota, lungi, and loincloths are frequently worn in India, which

is known for its authentic traditional attire. While some Indians save traditional clothes for festivals and special events, many wear them daily. In addition to being an essential part of the culture, these garments give people a sense of identity that connects them to their ancestry.

Storytelling and dance are frequently combined in India. While telling historical stories solidly rooted in the nation's rich traditions, performers dance. Ancient epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which describe the exploits of gods and demons, love and conflict, and themes of bravery, chariots, and kidnappings, are often the source of these tales. Indian society still heavily relies on these epic tales, which have been handed down through the ages. Hindi is one of the most frequently spoken languages in the nation. Language also plays a significant part in India's cultural identity, bringing individuals from all communities and geographical areas together.

Chopra currently lives in the US, which has unique traditions and customs. McKelvie and Zimmermann (2022) assert that various elements influence American culture, including language, religion, sports, fashion, cuisine, the

arts, and holidays.

In terms of language, McKelvie and Zimmermann point out that almost all the world's languages are spoken in the US. English, Spanish, Hawaiian, Chinese, French, German, and many more are among them. Nonetheless, English is the most widely spoken language in the nation since most people can understand it.

In terms of religion, the US, which is frequently described as a country of freedom, is home to people of many different faiths, including atheists. American fashions are equally varied, influenced by social standing, geography, occupation, and climate. Americans typically have few restrictions on how they can express themselves through fashion and prioritize comfort and individuality in their attire.

One of the most well-known aspects of American cuisine is its fast-food culture. American culture is also heavily influenced by sports, with baseball, basketball, hockey, and football being the most popular. These sports attract much attention, particularly during important games and competitions. The US also celebrates several holidays, including Presidents' Day, Thanksgiving, Labor Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day (McKelvie & Zimmermann, 2022).

India and America have different cultures, which significantly impact people residing in both countries. Through her Instagram posts, the subject of this study, Priyanka Chopra, provides insight into how she navigates a hybrid identity as a public figure. Young (1995) defines a hybrid identity as merging many racial and cultural backgrounds when people live between opposing traditions. As Chopra juggles her Indian ancestry with the American way of life she currently leads, it might be said that she has a "double identity".

According to Bakhtin (1981), hybridization is the mixing of cultures influenced by social distinctions and other elements. The experiences of Chopra provide light on the process of hybrid identity, which can take many different forms. To establish white people as superior, the British colonized nations like India during the colonial era. Because of this historical background, many Indians still view American and British cultures as frightful or domineering. Identity formation is still affected by these postcolonial consequences. Therefore, this study aims to

examine how Priyanka Chopra's public and personal lives reflect the lasting effects of colonialism by using a postcolonial lens to assess her hybrid identity.

METHODOLOGY

The data was gathered from a few chosen posts on Chopra's Instagram account to examine her hybrid identity. Chopra regularly posts personal updates, activities, and brand collaborations on Instagram, which is why it was selected as the primary source. The chosen posts cover the time before and after her marriage to Jonas, from January 2018 to 2024. These entries shed light on Chopra's navigating and expressing her dual identities as an American and an Indian.

This analysis uses two important theories: hybrid identity and postcolonialism. The hybrid identity theory examines Priyanka Chopra's dual identities as a public figure. Conversely, postcolonialism describes the time and conditions that follow colonialism. Loomba (1998) emphasizes postcolonialism's benefits and drawbacks. Language, food, music, art, and culture are all altered by postcolonialism, according to Loomba, as civilizations incorporate and adjust aspects of both indigenous and colonial influences.

Furthermore, Loomba (1998) clarifies that the word "postcolonial" describes a worldwide movement that incorporates elements of shared culture. In this analysis, postcolonialism particularly discusses Chopra's Indian ancestry and how it shaped her identity in America. Postcolonialism examines how colonization affects communities, emphasizing the whole cultural implications rather than a single facet (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002).

According to Loomba, postcolonialism is "not just coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (1998, p. 12). According to this perspective, every colonized country has a distinct heritage from that of its colonists. According to postcolonial theory, these legacies have shaped the modern world, as evidenced by the persistence of numerous antiquated traditions and customs. Even though colonialism is no longer officially dominant, its effects are nevertheless felt in society and people's daily lives.

According to Sawant (2011), "mixture, intermingling of different cultures" means the term hybrid identity. According to Barry (1995), one of the essential characteristics of postcoloniality is hybrid identity. It characterizes a state where a person moves between two or more cultural frameworks, leading to a dual or blended identity. This circumstance frequently poses a dilemma for people or countries as they try to balance adapting to new cultural standards and preserving their cultural history. Internal conflict or cultural discord may result from such tensions. This analysis views Chopra's hybrid identity through the lens of her Indian cultural heritage and how it influences her self-perception as she adjusts to a new cultural setting in a foreign country.

It is acknowledged that hybrid identity is both a feature and an effect of postcolonialism. During the colonial era, the idea of identity dualism initially surfaced. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002), "hybrid identity" describes the emergence of new transcultural forms inside the colonial contact zones. In addition to controlling certain areas, colonial powers left their societies with an enduring cultural legacy. Language diversity, cross-cultural interactions, and the blending of customs and cuisines are some of the factors that contribute to the creation of hybrid identities. Furthermore, a hybrid identity frequently emerges when people engage with or come from social and cultural backgrounds that are very different from their own. People often demonstrate hybrid identities because of their experiences navigating between two or more different cultural realms.

DISCUSSION

Priyanka Chopra lives between two countries and is surrounded by two cultures. Throughout her entertainment career, she has maintained a constant presence in the public eye. Chopra represented India in the Miss World 2000 pageant and took home the prestigious title, marking the beginning of her international journey. Since then, she has pursued career goals and maintained a public presence in India and the US. Moving between these two cultural domains, each with its traditions, values, and practices, has helped Chopra develop a hybrid identity.

Priyanka Chopra's Hybrid Identity Seen from a Postcolonial Point of View

As a famous public figure in Bollywood and Hollywood, the way that Chopra observes and honors important events and her public appearances represents her hybrid identity. These elements are explained in more detail below.

Through her appearance

Despite mainly living in the United States, Chopra maintains her Indian identity, especially in her fashion choices. She frequently wears traditional Indian clothing, particularly sarees, as seen in her Instagram posts. These sartorial choices indicate her commitment to preserving her ethnic roots. The variety of traditional attire demonstrates her ability to combine tradition with modern fashion she puts on ranging from basic and straightforward sarees to more contemporary, stylized styles.

However, Chopra demonstrates parts of an American identity, especially in her clothing choices. In terms of appearance, she frequently adopts modern Western fashions, which are considered "typically American." As innovation and fashion continue to advance, Chopra adjusts to different situations when she must wear contemporary, Western clothing devoid of traditional Indian accents. Several pictures she posted on Instagram demonstrate this flexibility and her ability to use fashion in navigating different levels of society.

Figure 1. Chopra's post on May 24, 2018
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

In one of her pictures, Chopra is pictured at an event called Children Uprooted, which was hosted in Bangladesh by UNICEF, while sporting a traditional Indian saree. Chopra used her clothing to symbolize her Indian ancestry despite the cultural divide between Bangladesh and India. To the children and guests in Bangladesh, her attendance was a message that people from different cultural origins may serve and inspire others while still staying true to who they are. In contrast, Chopra is shown at an event in New York wearing contemporary Western attire in another post. She can

represent an American identity, which is demonstrated by her sophisticated attire in this second picture, which demonstrates her flexibility in choosing clothing that fits the situation. Through wardrobe choices that suit various ethnic and situational needs, Chopra manages her hybrid identity, as these visual depictions show.

Figure 2. Chopra's post on January 13, 2018
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

The third picture shows Chopra standing next to her husband, Nick Jonas, while donning a contemporary saree. The saree, nevertheless, honors her Indian background even though it has been altered to fit a modern aesthetic. According to Yadav (2023), the saree has changed significantly over time. Because traditional and modern patterns have been combined, women now have more options. Because they reflect centuries-old traditions and rituals, traditional sarees have great cultural value.

However, since fashion keeps changing, new takes on traditional clothing have surfaced, creating what is today referred to as contemporary fashion. Modern sarees have cutting-edge materials, designs, and embellishments that provide adaptability for a range of settings and individual expressions. These contemporary looks embrace uniqueness, comfort, and authenticity while enabling women to honor their ethnic heritage.

Figure 3. Chopra's post on December 12, 2018
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Meanwhile, in the following shot, Chopra is seen attending a family event. Two of the males are dressed in formal suits, and the women are wearing traditional Indian sarees. Nevertheless, Chopra and Jonas, prefer to dress casually. Interestingly, Chopra is the only non-saree-wearing woman in the photo. She displays her American identity

in this case, demonstrating her capacity to adjust to a more casual Western style of dress in casual family situations. This decision supports her hybrid identity by showcasing her adaptability in balancing cultural norms with her comfort.

Figure 4. Chopra's post on January 28, 2019
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Another picture shows Chopra dressed in a traditional Indian saree at a Mumbai movie promotion event. She intends to preserve and honor her identity as an Indian woman, which is why she chose to wear the saree on that day. She chose to highlight her cultural heritage through her clothing because the event was held in India. In contrast, Chopra is pictured in another photo at the Met Gala, an annual event held in New York, USA, sporting an ensemble created by the well-known fashion label Dior. According to Met Gala (2021), the occasion is a high-profile fundraising extravaganza that opens the Costume Institute's

yearly fashion show and supports the organization.

Professionals from a variety of professions come together to network and showcase their creative ingenuity at the Met Gala, which is commonly considered the "Red Carpet Event" of the fashion industry. Despite being a one-night event, the related exhibit is accessible to the public for several months. Given this, Chopra's clothing, which is different from traditional Indian clothes, shows how she has adapted to American fashion culture. She made a dramatic, thematic fashion statement that reflected her identity as an American by associating herself with the 2019 Met Gala theme, Camp: Notes on Fashion. This demonstrates her identity's hybridity once more, as she switches between cultural expressions with ease depending on the situation.

Figure 5. Chopra's post on September 25, 2019
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Figure 6. Chopra's post on May 7,
2019
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

In addition, Figure 7 shows Chopra at an award ceremony in Marrakech while dressed in a traditional saree. By dressing in culturally meaningful attire, she demonstrates her pride in her Indian ancestry on this worldwide occasion. On a worldwide scale, she actively celebrates and promotes her Indian identity by wearing a saree. Image 8 shows Chopra at a UNICEF function in New York City, wearing a plain red dress. Instead of reflecting her Indian heritage, the laid-back Western ensemble is more in line with a global or American style. She presents herself as a non-Indian woman in this situation, adjusting to the social mores and expectations of the environment. These contrasted photos further highlight the way Chopra navigates and embodies aspects of both Indian and Western cultures, depending on the situation. In the

following pictures, her hybrid identity is still visible.

Figure 7. Chopra's post on December
6, 2019
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Figure 8. Chopra's post on December
5, 2019
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

In the following images, Chopra wears an Indian modern or contemporary *saree* at an event in Los Angeles. She shows up with her Indian identity there. Even though the event was not held in India, she proudly showed herself as an Indian. In her caption, Chopra said, "Happy Diwali eve… love, light and happiness to everyone. Kicking off the festivities with much gratitude

and surrounded by love.❤️✨". Her caption shows that she is not only undergoing a hybrid identity through her appearances but also extends beyond her fashion choices, which is also reflected in her self-presentation and communication.

Figure 9. Chopra's post on November 4, 2021
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

However, Figure 10 shows Chopra attending a Formula One race event in modern, casual clothing. Her clothing shows a Western sense of style, fitting the persona of an American or international celebrity. She exhibits her flexibility to the event's ambiance and global audience by going with a sleek and modern look. It is clear from her Instagram photos that Chopra displays and decides various aspects of her identity based on the situation. While some photos show her adopting a Western or American identity through contemporary design choices, others highlight her deep ties to her Indian

ancestry, which are frequently portrayed through traditional attire like sarees. Chopra's varied looks highlight her hybrid identity, which is influenced by her life and career in the West yet has roots in her Indian heritage.

Image 10. Chopra's post on November 30, 2023
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

It is obvious from Chopra's posts that she represents a hybrid identity. She regularly displays aspects of both her Indian background and her Western, especially American, lifestyle, which reflects her dual identity. Her choice of clothing, which includes both modern Western design and traditional sarees, reflects her ability to represent and deal with all cultural realms. As a well-known person, Chopra's clothing selections not only convey her individuality but also the difficulties and compromises of juggling two different cultures.

Through her celebration days

Priyanka Chopra was born and raised in India. Thus, she is accustomed to the cultures and festivals of her native country. As was already established, there are various cultural celebrations in India, many of which involve significant ceremonies and rituals. Chopra has posted pictures of herself actively taking part in these festivities on Instagram. Her engagement to American musician Jonas on August 18, 2018, is a noteworthy example. Chopra honored her Indian heritage by adding traditional Indian customs to their wedding journey, even though she married someone from a different cultural background. Chopra and Jonas participated in the ceremony with respect, and she is shown in image 11 wearing a traditional saree.

Engagement rituals have been a long-standing custom in many Indian societies, according to Engagement Rituals and Customs – Different Kinds of Engagement Rituals in India – Sagaai Rituals (n.d.). Although there could be slight regional or religious variances, the engagement ceremony's format and intent are largely the same throughout India. These gatherings are frequently hosted at a specified location or the bride's family home.

Chopra's choice to follow these traditions demonstrates a commitment to maintaining her Indian identity while establishing a life in a multicultural and international environment.

Image 11. Chopra's post on August 18, 2018
Chopra's traditional engagement
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Chopra chooses to adhere to the wedding customs because she is an Indian with rigorous and genuine traditions. Furthermore, it is evident that Jonas is open to adopting her Indian traditions. The engagement marks the beginning of the earliest Indian wedding custom. Chopra is wearing a saree and a scarf in her hair, as shown in image 11. In India, a couple formally announces their intention to get married during the engagement ceremony. In certain traditions, the lavish engagement ceremony holds equal significance to the wedding. The bride-to-be receives presents, food, and jewelry from the groom's family

during the ceremony, which is frequently hosted at the bride's house (Lemick, 2022).

Figure 12. Chopra's post on December 1, 2018 Chopra's traditional ritual, *The Mehndi*
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Chopra's caption, "The only way to do this... with Family and God", highlights the cultural and spiritual significance of the customs. She expressed her gratitude and emphasized the value of family and faith in commemorating such a significant occasion by saying, "Thank you all for your wishes and blessings 🙏❤️🎉". Her sincere expression, although she lives in the US and wears traditional Indian clothing, reveals a hybrid identity that embraces her existence in a Western setting while honoring her Indian background.

However, based on her Instagram posts, Chopra did not publicly share content from the Haldi ceremony (Nast, 2020). Chopra, who is Indian, followed several traditional rituals before her official marriage to Nick Jonas, including a Western-style white wedding and a series of Indian ceremonies like the Haldi, Mehndi, Sangeet, and Pheras. The first ritual she shared was the engagement, which is based on Indian tradition.

According to Jirsa (2018), the Mehndi ceremony is performed the night before the wedding and represents the bride's aspirations for good health and wealth as she goes into matrimony. The bride's family usually plans the event and invites female relatives from both sides to join the festivities.

> One of the most special things that our relationship has given us is a merging of families who love and respect each other's faiths and cultures. And so planning our wedding with an amalgamation of both was so so amazing. An important part of the pre wedding rituals for the girl in an Indian wedding is the Mehendi. Once again we made it our own and it was an afternoon that kicked off the celebrations in the way we both dreamed. @nickjonas (Instagram.com/priyankachopra, on December 1, 2025)

As seen in her caption, Chopra's thoughts on the Mehndi ceremony highlight the strong intercultural bond she has with

her spouse and the respect their families have for one another. Her focus on incorporating Western and Indian elements into the wedding demonstrates how she actively manages her hybrid identity. In addition to respecting customary Indian pre-wedding rites, she presents the occasion as a customized celebration influenced by the backgrounds and values of both partners. Through this deliberate blending of traditions, Chopra creates a distinctive, cross-cultural expression of herself while navigating and embracing her position between two cultures, Indian and American.

Additionally, according to Jirsa (2018), the Sangeet ceremony is customarily a celebration with the gathering of female relatives who sing and dance. However, in contemporary days, this rite has also changed to involve men. As per Chopra's Instagram post, she joined members of Nick Jonas's family and her extended family to celebrate the Sangeet ceremony. A dance performance between the two families united everyone and promoted family harmony (Jirsa, 2018).

It all began as a fierce song & dance competition between the families but ended, as always, as a huge

celebration of love. Nick and I were looking forward to the Sangeet (musical evening), another pre wedding ritual.. and to see what each side had put together.
And what a performance it was. Each family telling our stories through song and dance, filled with lots of laughter and love. We were both filled with gratitude for the effort, the love and the laughter and will carry the memories of this special evening for the rest of our lives. It is an amazing start to a lifetime of togetherness for our families and friends...#grateful @nickjonas
🎥/📷: @calebjordanlee @josevilla @josephradhik
(Instagram.com/priyankachopra, on Dec 2, 2018)

In her caption, Chopra emphasizes the Sangeet event as a happy merging of ethnic customs, where both families created enduring memories by celebrating with song and dancing. As the ceremony evolved into a manifestation of cultural pride and solidarity, her reflection on the occasion, which began as a fierce competition and evolved into a festival of love, highlights the blending of her Indian ancestry with Western views. Chopra's remarks express her appreciation for merging family customs and show how she manages her dual identity by

valuing her Indian heritage and her life in the US with Nick Jonas. This festival emphasizes love and family and is a perfect example of two cultures coming together.

Following that, Chopra observed the Pheras rite. The Pheras is one of the most important traditions during an Indian wedding, according to Beyond the Vows (n.d.). The pair walks around a sacred fire, an agni, or another significant spiritual object, like the Guru Granth Sahib Ji in Sikh rituals.

Figure 13. Chopra's post on December 2, 2018
Chopra's traditional wedding ritual, *The Sangeet*.
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Figure 14. Chopra's post on December 4, 2018
Chopra's traditional wedding ritual, *The Pheras*
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

However, Chopra also decided to include a Christian wedding ceremony in the Western tradition because she married an American. She posted several pictures from the white wedding on Instagram, showing both families wearing formal dresses and suits, which is typical of Western wedding customs. Chopra's decision emphasizes her hybrid identity as she embraces and navigates Indian and American cultural practices. By combining different traditions into her wedding, Chopra shows herself as both Indian and American, reflecting her life as a public figure in the US.
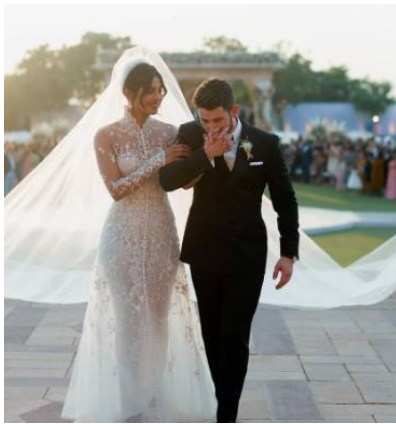
Figure 15. Chopra's post on December 4, 2018
The White Wedding
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Figure 16. Chopra's post on December 8, 2018
The White Wedding
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

It is clear from the pictures above that Chopra and her spouse also had a contemporary, Western-style wedding celebration. They performed a white wedding following the completion of the customary Indian wedding rituals. In general, the phrase "white wedding" describes weddings that are Western-style and incorporate all the traditional elements that are expected in the US, including the bride wearing white, the exchange of rings and vows, the presence of bridesmaids and groomsmen, and a reception that includes speeches (Amour, 2023).

Chopra's embrace of several cultural traditions further reflects her hybrid identity as both Indian and American. She still observes Indian holidays and customs even though she lives in the US. Chopra recounts instances on social media where she celebrates different traditions and societies she encounters. She seeks blessings at Shree Siddhivinayak and celebrates important cultural events like Diwali, Holi, and Karwa Chauth as an Indian. Her dedication to preserving her Indian heritage while living in a global setting is demonstrated by the photos she shares, which reflect these festivals.

Figure 17. Chopra's post on November 5, 2021
Diwali Celebration
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Chopra continues celebrating important traditional holidays,

as shown in pictures 17 through 23, to keep her Indian identity. She regularly celebrates several Indian holidays, including Karwachauth, Holi, and Diwali. Diwali, which is celebrated on November 12, is essential. Diwali, also called the "festival of lights", honors the virtues of knowledge, freedom, and victory, as well as the victory of good over evil and the return of light over darkness (Burnett, 2023). Hundreds of candles and diyas, or ceramic lamps, are lit during this event and placed on the streets and people's houses to light up the night. Much of India observes Diwali as a five-day festival, with the main celebrations on the third day (Burnett, 2023).

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु लक्ष्मी रूपेण संस्थिता।
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः
With the blessings of Goddess Mahalakshmi we invite Her grace and abundance into our home.

Happy Diwali 🪔

📷 @maneeshkgoyal(Instagram.com/priyankachopra, on November 5, 2021)

Chopra celebrates Diwali by calling upon the blessings of Goddess Mahalakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, prosperity, and abundance. She offers the following Sanskrit verse: "या देवी सर्वभूतेषु लक्ष्मी रूपेण संस्थलता।॰॰ी. The traditional mantra "नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै

नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः" honors the divine feminine spirit in all beings, particularly in the form of Lakshmi. In addition to demonstrating her command of the Hindi language, Chopra's inclusion of this prayer in Hindi enhances the celebration's cultural depth and personal link to her Indian spiritual heritage. Her decision to share this holy passage with her audience demonstrates her pride in her background. It highlights the importance of preserving local customs even in an increasingly English-speaking, globalized world.

Celebrating Diwali shows that Chopra tended to wear *a saree*, traditional Indian clothes. Further, in her posts, it seems that Chopra shares her moments celebrating Diwali each year.

Figure 18. Chopra's post on March 7, 2020
Holi Celebration
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Holi is the next Indian holiday Chopra takes part in. Holi is an annual celebration of

spring's arrival in either February or March, based on when it falls within the Hindu calendar month of Phalguna. To represent the annihilation of evil spirits, people congregate around a bonfire called Holika on the eve of Holi to sing and dance. People frequently throw objects into the fire, including wood, twigs, dried leaves, popcorn, grains, coconuts, and roasted chickpeas (Caruso, 2023).

Further, the next celebration is Karwachauth. In Karwachauth, married women follow the challenging nirjala vrat (fasting without food or drink) in devotion to their husbands' safety and well-being. From dawn until moonrise, they maintain the fast (Pallavi, 2023). Hence, by celebrating those days, Chopra's identity as an Indian is shown.

Figure 19. Chopra's post on October 18, 2019
Karwachauth
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Chopra proudly maintains her Indian identity, as shown by the Indian festivities she posts on Instagram. Even though she is married to an American, she uses her social media platform as a public figure with a large global following to convey to her audience that she still feels a strong connection to her Indian heritage. She demonstrates her dedication to her ancestry in a global setting by sharing traditional customs, which strengthens her sense of self and sends a strong message to her followers worldwide.

The following pictures, however, also show Chopra's American identity as she participates in Christian festivities that follow her husband's family's customs. Her holiday celebrations have changed since she married a Christian American man. Chopra has shared moments from her Valentine's Day, Christmas, Easter, and Anniversary Day celebrations on Instagram. These celebrations demonstrate how she has assimilated American cultural customs, highlighting her mixed identity that combines American and Indian elements.

Christmas is the first holiday. Chopra has posted moments of her Christmas celebrations with her family, especially her husband, on

Instagram on several occasions. She has shared several posts with a Christmas theme, including image 20. Chopra eagerly participates in the Christmas festivities in these pictures, showing her respect for her husband's Christian beliefs. She is also spotted spending time with her spouse while wearing loose, comfy clothing, emphasizing the holiday's laid-back and personal vibe.

Figure 20. Chopra's post on December
26, 2020
Christmas
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Easter is the next holiday. Chopra also celebrates Easter, as seen in image 21, underscoring her adherence to Christian and Indian customs. She enthusiastically participates in Christian holidays even though she has a strong connection to Indian traditional events. Chopra's family's involvement in the event is symbolized by the photo she provides of herself

and her daughter wearing an Easter-themed blouse.

Figure 21. Chopra's post on April
10, 2023
Easter
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Figure 22. Chopra's post on February
14, 2021
Valentine's Day
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Figure 23. Chopra's post on December 1, 2022
Anniversary's day
Source: Instagram.com/priankachopra

Chopra can be seen enjoying Valentine's Day in image 22. Although younger Indian generations generally celebrate Valentine's Day, cultural discussions have recently been about its applicability. Conservative voices have suggested changing it to "Cow Hug Day," which would honor cows as sacred animals in Hinduism. Concerns that Western influences, including Valentine's Day, would erode traditional Indian values and practices are the basis for this proposal (Feldman, 2023). Chopra's involvement in the festival further solidifies her hybrid identity by showcasing her ties to international, especially Western, cultural customs.

Additionally, Chopra and Jonas can be seen enjoying their wedding anniversary in image 23. Since her marriage, she has frequently shared posts

honoring this event, following the custom of many American couples. Her Indian origin is still frequently reflected in her anniversary celebrations, in any case. She published a throwback photo of herself wearing a modern Indian dress with traditional ornaments in one anniversary post, for example. In contrast, Nick Jonas was dressed in a modern Western-style suit. Chopra's hybrid identity is emphasized by this image, which shows her embracing aspects of Western, mainly American, cultural customs while also honoring her Indian heritage.

Interpretation of Priyanka Chopra's Hybrid Identity through Postcolonial Point of View

Chopra is balances Indian and American traditions and cultures. Her experiences in two different cultural contexts, the modernity of the US and the traditional values of rural India shaped her hybrid identity. Her Instagram photos, in which she discusses various customs and holidays from both cultures, effectively highlight this cultural duality. Chopra's hybrid identity is a result of postcolonial processes, as was previously mentioned. Her social media presence is an example of the long-lasting consequences of colonial

influence, especially the expression of hybridity from a postcolonial standpoint. These depictions demonstrate how the postcolonial age still shapes identities, especially regarding the mixing and coexistence of many cultural affinities.

The concept of cultural polyvalence, which describes the state in which individuals or groups concurrently belong to many cultural traditions, including oral and local customs, is said by postcolonial critics to shape identity frequently. Given that the cultural legacies of colonialism influence it, Priyanka Chopra's hybrid identity, seen through a postcolonial lens, represents this phenomenon. Chopra navigates both Indian and American cultures with a sense of ambivalence that is typical of hybrid identity, which is the conflict between adjusting to new cultural influences and maintaining one's original cultural roots.

CONCLUSION

Chopra intentionally portrays herself as both Indian and American, capturing the difficulties and compromises of identity in a postcolonial, international society. Moreover, the study highlights that Chopra embodies a hybrid

identity due to postcolonial influence. She demonstrates how one can adopt aspects of American and Western cultures while preserving Indian heritage. This duality reflects a key characteristic of postcolonial identity, hybridity, which signifies identity's shifting and evolving nature in response to cultural transformations rooted in colonial history. Chopra's experience illustrates how identities are no longer fixed but are continuously shaped by the intersection of local traditions and global influences.

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The Implementation of AUKUS in American Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the implementation of AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, to enable Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. The transfer of the submarines under AUKUS raised tensions between the U.S. and China and some Southeast Asian countries. They slammed the U.S., claiming the partnership could destabilize security in the Indo-Pacific. Despite these rising tensions, the U.S. continues to advance AUKUS. This research seeks to explore the implementation of AUKUS, discussing how the American government achieves the objective of the partnership. This research uses Graham Allison's Rational Actor Theory and employs a qualitative method to examine the calculation of costs and benefits behind the establishment of AUKUS and to analyze its implementation, with interviews and a literature review in place. This research finds that the U.S. is gradually implementing AUKUS by initiating training programs and joint military exercises aimed at preparing Australian personnel to operate nuclear-powered submarines effectively. Despite growing protests against AUKUS, the U.S. remains committed to maintaining this partnership due to its strategic benefits: enhancing power projection, expanding influence, and strengthening deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. This research contributes to enriching literature on AUKUS.

Keywords: *American foreign policy; AUKUS; Australia; China; Indo-Pacific; nuclear-powered submarines; security partnership*

INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2021, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia launched the trilateral security cooperation AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific region. This pact showcases their vigorous commitment to enhancing their military power by enabling Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines with assistance from the U.S. and the U.K. These submarines are faster and harder to detect than conventionally powered fleets, with the additional capacities of staying submerged for extended periods and launching missiles over greater distances (BBC, 2021). American President Joe Biden explained that the three countries saw AUKUS as a way to strengthen ties among U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific, promoting collaboration and harmony in the region (Mada, 2021).

AUKUS, however, reflects Biden's foreign policy to deter China and counter its growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, according to existing studies. Yida (2024) analyzed that the U.S. formed AUKUS to challenge China's expanding regional power by sharing nuclear submarine technology with Australia as a means of balancing military power. Saputro, Ulung, & Abdurrohim (2024) also viewed China's rising dominance in military, economy, and infrastructure as a cause for U.S. concern; thus, Biden positioned Australia at the forefront of advancing American interests there. They opined that the U.S. perceived China's assertiveness—especially regarding territorial disputes involving U.S. allies— as threatening its position in the region. Santoso et al. (2023) also argued that China's unilateral claim over the disputed South China Sea motivated the U.S. to establish AUKUS. They explained that the U.S. used AUKUS as a way to balance China's power, safeguard its allies, and maintain regional dominance.

The existing studies mainly explore why the U.S. established AUKUS (Korwa & Wambrauw, 2023; Novita, 2022; Santoso et al., 2023; Saputro, Ulung, & Abdurrohim, 2024; Tsuruoka, 2021), describe how China and Southeast Asian countries responded (Darmawan & Karmilawaty, 2023; Oktavianto, 2023), and predict how the pact might affect security dynamic across the Indo-Pacific (Imannurdin et al., 2024; Li, 2022; Saputro, Ulung, Abdurrohim, et al., 2024; Yida,

2024). They, however, have yet to examine how AUKUS is being implemented – a gap that I would like to address in this research. I intend to explore how the U.S. put the pact into effect in implementing its foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, a research question raised in this research is: "How did the U.S. implement AUKUS?" This inquiry serves as a novelty of this research.

This research found that the American government implemented AUKUS progressively through initiatives such as training Australian forces on operating nuclear-powered submarines alongside joint exercises involving all three countries—the U.S., U.K., and Australia—thereby enhancing interoperability among their militaries. This article contributes to adding valuable knowledge about both the practical application and strategic significance of AUKUS beyond existing literature.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research question, I employed a qualitative method that included both a literature review and interviews. For data collection, I conducted interviews with two lecturers from the International Relations Department at Universitas Indonesia: Edy Prasetyono, Ph.D. in July 2022 and Prof. Evi Fitriani in August 2022. I also reviewed books, journal articles, and news reports, combining the data from the interviews with extensive literature reviews to discuss how the U.S. implemented AUKUS in its foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific, with Graham Allison's Rational Actor Theory in place. Therefore, in this section, I provide an overview of the concept of foreign policy as well as Allison's rational actor theory.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to the strategies and actions a country employs to reach national objectives beyond its exclusive territories. It involves a government's planned approach to managing relationships and interactions with other nations on the global stage. Therefore, foreign policy comprises a goal that state representatives seek abroad, values that underlie the goals, and the instruments that they use to pursue them (Kegley & Blanton, 2010).

According to Joseph Frankel, foreign policy is a combination of decisions and actions that shape how countries relate to one another. A set of actions

in foreign policy is formulated within a country's borders. The government then directs the actions towards external forces to reach national interests abroad. Foreign policy, therefore, foreign policy encompasses both its formulation and execution. It shapes how a country behaves internationally to benefit its citizens at home (AS, 2018, p. 2).

Foreign policy refers to the sum of external actions carried out by a country to reach advantageous outcomes abroad for the country (Joffé, 2008). According to Adeed Dawisha, foreign policy has three scopes: the influences of foreign policy, the decision-making process, and the implementation of foreign policy. The influences of foreign policy revolve around domestic and international factors that influence the formulation of foreign policy. The decision-making process describes how foreign policy is formulated at home. The implementation of foreign policy explains how the government executes foreign policy to reach desired outcomes (Setiawati, 2023, p. 23).

Graham Allison's Rational Actor Theory

Graham Allison offers the Rational Actor Theory as a framework for understanding the decision-making process in international relations. In this theory, Allison argues that actors, from individuals to states, use rationality in making decisions, meaning that they calculate costs and benefits to get maximum utility. Therefore, in international relations, states play rational actors that formulate foreign policy rationally to pursue national interests (Allison, 1971).

National interest means what benefits the state as a whole. It encompasses areas such as national security, economic growth, political stability, and the country's reputation on the global stage. Rational Actor Theory treats national interest as an objective set of preferences or goals that guide rational decision-making by the state. The government acts to maximize these interests through calculated choices. National interest represents the aims or targets that a nation strives to accomplish or safeguard through its domestic and foreign policies (Allison, 1971).

Allison (1971) views government action as the basic

unit of analysis in this rational actor theory, arguing that governments will select actions that will maximize their strategic goals and objectives. He conceives the government as a rational decision-maker. This decision-maker has a set of goals and options, with consequences that constitute costs and benefits. The rational actor evaluates the costs and benefits to obtain a value-maximizing option. The actor ranks the options and then rationally chooses the option with the highest benefits. This process is grounded in logical calculation rather than randomness or emotion. Once a decision is made, the entire government machinery works cohesively to carry out the chosen policy efficiently without significant deviation or conflict among agencies (Allison, 1971, p. 33).

DISCUSSION

Employing Graham Allison's rational actor theory, I argue that the American foreign policy of establishing AUKUS illustrates a rational and calculated decision by President Joe Biden to reach the U.S.'s national interest in the Indo-Pacific: balancing China's growing military and economic power and deterring its aggressive actions in the region.

According to Allison (1971), states act as rational actors. The rationality drives them to roll out a foreign policy that can maximize benefits in pursuit of national interest. Therefore, states calculate the costs and benefits of making foreign policy before they act. States weigh the potential costs against the expected benefits of their foreign policy. With Allison's rational choice theory in place, Biden's calculation of costs and benefits when he decided on AUKUS will be explained first. After that, how the American president implemented AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific to take the benefits in pursuit of the expected national interests will be described.

Launching AUKUS: Biden's Rational Choice

AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership formed by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia on September 15, 2021. In an interview with Universitas Indonesia lecturer Edy Prasetyono, he deemed AUKUS as a military technology collaboration among the three countries because it contained the U.S. and U.K.'s commitments to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022). The nuclear aspect of these submarines has sparked

criticism and protests from several countries including Indonesia due to concerns that AUKUS could destabilize regional security in the Indo-Pacific. Indonesian President Joko Widodo, for example, expressed apprehension that AUKUS would provoke an arms race and intensify rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, expecting the three countries to follow nuclear non-proliferation obligations in the region (Li, 2022, p. 271).

Despite the protests, AUKUS holds immense strategic importance for the U.S. The White House senior official said:

> This is a fundamental decision — fundamental — that binds decisively Australia to the United States and Great Britain for generations. This is the biggest strategic step that Australia has taken in generations (The White House, 2021).

The Biden administration claimed that AUKUS aimed to sustain peace and establish stability in the Indo-Pacific (The White House, 2021). However, Tsuruoka (2021) analyzed that the U.S. set up the security partnership to strengthen its military posture in the Indo-Pacific to confront China. Therefore, the U.S. needed to involve its ally in the region: Australia. AUKUS will benefit the U.S. because it will give the country access to locate its submarines in one of the Australian military bases: RAN Stirling base near Perth, Western Australia, or a new facility near Darwin, the Northern Territory that has closer proximity to the South China Sea (Tsuruoka, 2021, p. 3). The use of the military base represents one of the benefits that the U.S. expects to get from AUKUS. This logistical benefit aligns with Graham Allison's rational choice theory, which says that states evaluate expected gains versus risks when formulating foreign policies designed for maximum utility. The benefits expected from AUKUS comprise:

Strengthening Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific

AUKUS will help the U.S. bolster its deterrence capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S., therefore, intends to initiate the trilateral security cooperation because it will enable the country to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and other forms of advanced military technology to deter China.

Biden has set deterrence as one of the primary national security priorities in his foreign policy. With

deterrence, the president intended to prevent direct threats against the U.S. and its allies while safeguarding its global hegemony. He acknowledged that cooperation strengthened the alliance's deterrence. As such, the country sought to team up with allies like the U.K. and Australia, culminating in AUKUS (Novita, 2022).

The strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China became a major catalyst for forming AUKUS. As tensions escalated, Washington adopted this trilateral security framework as a new approach to deter China's growing power (Li, 2022, p. 283). Chong (2021) deemed AUKUS the U.S.'s signal of pursuing military deterrence against China in its foreign policy. Koga (2024) revealed that the American, British, and Australian governments have shared strategic concerns about containing China since 2010 because Beijing keeps challenging international orders in economy, military, and diplomacy.

China's aggressive territorial claims in the Indo-Pacific motivated Australia to acquire submarines as its strategic deterrence to improve naval capabilities and ensure the freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. The U.K. has bolstered its nuclear power industry to increase its defensive and diplomatic presence in the region. Meanwhile, the U.S. has underscored this region's importance since 2017 by emphasizing it in its National Security Strategy and committing to share nuclear technology with Australia (Koga, 2024, p. 15). In an interview with University of Indonesia lecturer Prof. Evi Fitriani, she explained that the three countries formed AUKUS because they felt threatened by China. Therefore, they sought to deter and counter China through AUKUS. She said:

> The U.S.-China rivalry will intensify. That's why the U.S. will take all necessary steps to counter China (Fitriani, interview, August 2022).

Like Fitriyani, Edy Prasetyono of the University of Indonesia also argued that AUKUS aimed to contain China's expanding geopolitical and security influences in the Indo-Pacific. He explained that the U.S. set up AUKUS as a robust American-led security umbrella above existing security partnerships, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and intelligence alliance The Five

Eyes (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022).

Reinforcing Influence in the Indo-Pacific

AUKUS will enable the U.S. to reinforce its strategic influence across the Indo-Pacific through the development of nuclear-powered submarines in Australia. This trilateral security cooperation will solidify the strategic alliance between the U.S., the U.K., and Australia and strengthen their alignment to address shared security challenges and ensure unified efforts against potential common threats.

The transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technology from the U.S. to Australia in AUKUS will give the U.S. expanded operational reach in the Indo-Pacific because it allows the country to deploy its aircraft, facilitate joint exercises, and give it access to Australian airfields in the region. The collaboration of the three countries in AUKUS will enhance the collective military capabilities of their alliance, including U.S. naval capacities, and give the U.S. a stronger position in its rivalry with China (Leonova, 2022).

Biden sought to reinforce American influence in the Indo-Pacific through AUKUS because

he saw the region had crucial strategic value for the U.S. The new edition of the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the U.S. highlighted the value and influence of the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century. Biden said:

> We will focus on every corner of the region, from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia to South Asia and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands (The White House, 2022, p. 6).

In the Indo-Pacific, Australia also expects the U.S. to increase its regional engagement for its security. Australia's security has depended heavily on the U.S. since the two countries signed the ANZUS treaty in 1951. The signing of the treaty marked the cornerstone of Australian foreign policy as it formalized its alliance with the U.S. AUKUS will make Australia's security more dependent on the U.S. Cox et al. (2023) argued that Australia had a fear of abandonment in its strategic culture. Australia always fears that the U.S. will abandon it because the country believes that its core security can only be assured through US support. Australia also perceives its alliance with the U.S. as a fundamental pillar for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific amid geopolitical changes (Thomas et al., 2013, p. 2).

The fact that the U.S. is a security umbrella for Australia makes Australia expect the U.S. to be more present in the Indo-Pacific after AUKUS is established. Australia needs AUKUS to expect US support to counter and balance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Prof. Evi Fitriani of the University of Indonesia elaborated that Australia fears China on three levels. On a domestic level, Australians have anti-China sentiments. At a regional level, Australia fears China for its aggressive moves in unilateral claims in the South China Sea dispute. On a global level, the intense U.S.-China rivalry worries Australia (Fitriani, interview, August 2022). Like Fitriyani, Edy Prasetyono also echoed similar views emphasizing how Canberra consistently regards Beijing as an existential threat requiring firm allied responses (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022).

Increasing Military Power in the Indo-Pacific

AUKUS will benefit the U.S. because the trilateral security cooperation enables the country to strengthen its military power in the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS allows the U.S. to develop its defense technology because it facilitates the country to collect research and development resources and foster innovation in certain areas, from cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence, to hypersonic missiles. This defense technology cooperation will increase the U.S. military capacities in the Indo-Pacific, providing the country with a decisive edge against China. With AUKUS in place, the U.S. can share secure information and establish trust with its allies, something important for the three countries to maintain regional stability and address emerging threats (Dolan, 2024).

For the U.S., initiating cooperation in the aforementioned areas is important. In the cybersecurity area, for example, the U.S. is also a target of cyberattacks. In 2020, the country was attacked by the SolarWinds Hack and the Colonial Pipeline ransomware. This ransomware attack disrupted energy distribution across the U.S. Cyberattacks from state or non-state actors disrupted networks, crippled financial systems, destabilized government, and dislocated social life (Dolan, 2024, p. 6).

The U.S. also seeks to strengthen the military power of its traditional allies in the Indo-Pacific, particularly Australia, through AUKUS. Australia has an important

position in American foreign policy. In 2002, former American president George W. Bush even deemed Australia as "America's sheriff" in the Asia-Pacific region (ABC News, 2003). Consequently, Washington expects Canberra's unwavering support during any conflicts involving China. However, according to Leonova (2022), the U.S. had never transferred nuclear submarine technology to other nations before the formation of AUKUS. The government previously believed that transferring nuclear submarine technology could weaken its global maritime dominance. As such, Leonova (2022) opined that the transfer of nuclear-powered submarines in AUKUS showed growing American apprehension about China's expanding influence across the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. perceives itself as vulnerable amid Beijing's assertive regional actions, hoping Australia and the U.K. would support the U.S. in keeping its position as a regional leader and security umbrella in the Indo-Pacific. Such vulnerability also played a part in motivating the U.S. to make AUKUS with the U.K. and Australia (Leonova, 2022). From the Australian side, Australia also needs nuclear-powered submarines from the U.S. According to Edy Prasetyono, Australia expects new

submarines to replace the existing Collins-class submarines that the Australian government deems outdated. The Royal Australian Navy has operated the Australian-built diesel-electric submarines since the 1990s. The Australian government had plans for submarine modernization well before establishing AUKUS (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022).

Despite such benefits, President Joe Biden was also aware of the costs behind the decision to make AUKUS. In rational choice theory, Allison, p. (1971, p. 33) explains that an action will produce a series of consequences, which constitute benefits and costs. The cost of making AUKUS is that this cooperation has raised the eyebrows of China and some countries in Southeast Asia.

Facing objections from Southeast Asian countries

The foreign policy of making AUKUS causes the United States to face anti-nuclear protests because this trilateral security cooperation facilitates Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. The launch of AUKUS led to the rise of objections and protests in Southeast Asia because the transfer of nuclear technology from the U.S. to

Australia in AUKUS could destabilize the region and undermine nuclear non-proliferation norms.

AUKUS sparks objections and protests from Malaysia and Indonesia because the trilateral security cooperation involves their close neighbor, Australia. Both countries have expressed apprehension about potential nuclear proliferation risks stemming from this cooperation. The Indonesian government criticized AUKUS, warning that procuring nuclear-powered submarines from the U.S. to Australia might fuel the arms race and increase power projection in the Indo-Pacific. Australia's decision to join AUKUS and acquire nuclear-powered submarines made Indonesia wary, prompting reminders for Australia about its obligations under nuclear non-proliferation agreements. During a meeting with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo conveyed his concerns that AUKUS could escalate regional rivalries (Li, 2022, p. 271).

Like Jokowi, Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah also worried that AUKUS would prompt an arms race, increase tension among superpowers, and involve them in aggression in the Indo-

Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. Malaysia rejected great power interference in the Indo-Pacific, stressing the importance of keeping peace and security in the region, including disarming nuclear weapons, promoting nuclear non-proliferation, and using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes (Umar & Santoso, 2023, p. 442).

Facing China's Strong Opposition

China slams the United States for establishing AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific. This trilateral cooperation elicits significant objections from the Chinese government, primarily because of its strategic implication in the region. China perceives the sharing of advanced military technology in AUKUS as a direct attempt to curb its regional influence, viewing that the cooperation will trigger an arms race, increase nuclear risks, and revive the Cold War atmosphere in the Indo-Pacific.

For China, AUKUS describes the irresponsibility and narrow-mindedness of the United States and its traditional allies in their foreign policy. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijjian said that the security pact would harm regional peace and

intensify arms competition across the Indo-Pacific countries. He continued to criticize AUKUS for displaying the obsolete Cold War mentality, believing that the pact would backfire on the interests of the three countries. Chinese state media also denounced the cooperation, slamming the United States for using AUKUS to drag Australia into the U.S.-China rivalry and turn Australia into an adversary of China (BBC, 2021).

Zhao Lijian called the three countries out on AUKUS, labeling the policy of exporting nuclear-power submarine technology to Australia as an irresponsible double standard. The technology transfer drove him to question Australia's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. He demanded the three countries remove the Cold War zero-sum mentality, discard narrow-minded geopolitical concepts, and respect regional peace and stability (Davidson & Blair, 2021).

China's backlash against AUKUS has drawn the attention of scholars. Yida (2024) argued that AUKUS reflected a major shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific to counter China's influence. China understood the objective of AUKUS, perceiving it as the U.S.'s way to provoke the rivalry between the two countries. Therefore, AUKUS can exacerbate the security dilemma in the region. Unlike Yida, Kalanuzza (2023) suggested that these diverging perceptions between Washington versus Beijing fueled escalating tensions over this pact. For the U.S., AUKUS represents essential defense against what it perceives as a Chinese threat; meanwhile, China views the U.S. itself as threatening regional stability through such alliances — thus neither side believes these moves will foster lasting peace or security throughout the Indo-Pacific waters. Their conflicting viewpoints continue deepening hostility following the launch of this trilateral agreement.

Implementing AUKUS

Using Graham Allison's rational actor theory above, I argue that establishing AUKUS is a rational foreign policy made by President Joe Biden to respond to China's expanding influences and aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in its territorial issues with some Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea. For instance, around Thitu Island, China has demonstrated aggressive actions by deploying vessels to intimidate the Philippines and assert its claim over the

island. These military maneuvers near Thitu exemplify China's broader strategy to assert control over the entire South China Sea (Karmilawaty & Janvy, 2024, p. 204). AUKUS enables the American president to reach three benefits in the Indo-Pacific: strengthening deterrence, reinforcing influence, and increasing power. However, initiating AUKUS has strained relations between the U.S. and some Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia while also heightening tensions with China. Despite the rising tensions, AUKUS remains a rational choice that maximizes benefits for the U.S. With those benefits in place, Biden intends to reach the U.S.'s national interest: balancing China's rising military and economic power and deterring its aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific.

Figure 1. The Calculation of Costs and Benefits in the Making of AUKUS

AUKUS has two major pillars. The first pillar aims to develop nuclear-powered submarines and enhance maritime capabilities (Dolan, 2024, p. 2). The second pillar focuses on the development of advanced technologies, interoperability, and integration in eight functional areas. They comprise hypersonic missiles, artificial intelligence, undersea capabilities, advanced cybersecurity, quantum technology, autonomous weapon systems, information sharing, and innovation. This second pillar seeks to facilitate the U.S., the U.K., and Australia to strengthen their collaboration and trust while addressing emerging threats in the Indo-Pacific (Dolan, 2024, p. 3).

This research finds that since the establishment of the trilateral security pact in September 2021, the United States has placed greater emphasis on advancing the first pillar of AUKUS to counter China. The U.S. has carried out this agreement by providing training to Australian military and civilian personnel, enhancing their expertise and ability to operate nuclear-powered submarines. Additionally, since 2021, the U.S. has organized multiple high-level meetings and
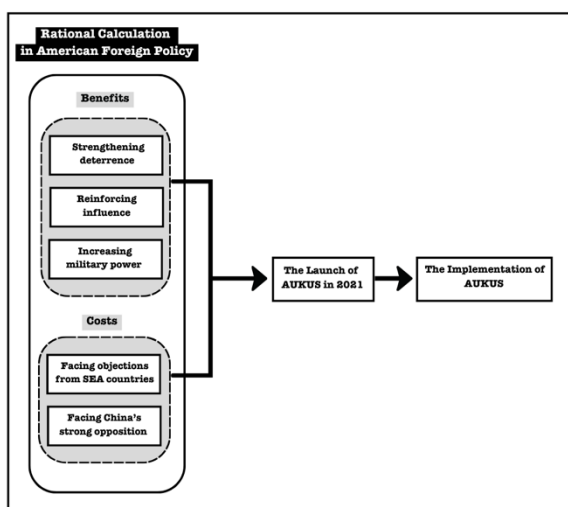
discussions focused on strengthening the defense partnership among the three nations, including negotiations related to submarine agreements. Details about these submarine deals were made public during a joint announcement in March 2023 by U.S. President Joe Biden, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. They revealed that Australia would receive between three to five Virginia class submarines from the U.S. by the early 2030s. The U.S. decided to sell its submarines to Australia, naming them SSN-AUKUS. Biden stated:

> The ultimate goal isn't just selling subs to Australia. It's developing something new together. We're calling it the SSN-AUKUS. This new state-of-the-art conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine will work — that will combine U.S. submarine — U.K. submarine technology and design with American technology (The White House, 2023b).

The U.S. operates 115 submarines (Ragheb, 2011, p. 25), with over half being nuclear-powered vessels actively deployed in naval operations. Ragheb (2011) shared these nuclear-powered submarines constitute roughly 40% of America's combatant fleet, highlighting their strategic significance in modern maritime warfare.

The United States operates various types of nuclear submarines, primarily Ballistic Missile Submarines (SSBNs) and Attack Submarines (SSNs). The Ohio-class SSBNs function as strategic deterrents by carrying long-range nuclear missiles designed for second-strike capability. Meanwhile, SSNs like the Los Angeles class, Seawolf class, and Virginia class perform diverse missions such as tracking enemy submarines and surface ships, conducting intelligence operations, and deploying special forces.

Power Plant	Single S9G PWR Single shaft with pump jet propulsion One secondary propulsion submerged motor
Displacement	7,800 tons, submerged
Length	277 ft
Draft	32 ft
Beam	34 ft
Speed	25+ knots, submerged
Horizontal tubes	Four 21 inches torpedo tubes
Vertical tubes	12 Vertical Launch System Tubes
Weapon systems	39, including: Vertical Launch System Tomahawk Cruise Missiles Mk 48 ADCAP Heavy weight torpedoes Advanced Mobile Mines Unmanned Undersea Vehicles
Special warfare	Dry Deck Shelter
Sonars	Spherical active/passive arrays Light Weight Wide Aperture Arrays TB-16, TB-29 and future towed arrays High frequency chin and sail arrays
Counter measures	1 internal launcher 14 external launchers
Crew	113 officers and men

Figure 2. The Specifications of Virginia Class Submarines
Source: Ragheb, M. (2011, p. 27)

Before the planned sale of U.S. Virginia Class Submarines

in the 2030s, the U.S. began implementing the AUKUS agreement by initiating training and development programs for Australian military and civilian personnel. Starting in 2023, Australian personnel were embedded within U.S. Navy submarine industrial facilities as part of this program (The White House, 2023a). For instance, in early 2024, over 20 sailors and officers from the Royal Australian Navy underwent training through the U.S. Navy Submarine Training system to complete the naval nuclear power training pipeline. Upon finishing their training, these individuals served aboard U.S. Virginia Class Submarines (The White House, 2024). The U.S. government also announced plans to expand this program so that more than 100 Royal Australian Navy personnel will participate across various locations in the United States to ensure Australia's preparedness for operating its own Virginia Class Submarines starting in the early 2030s (The White House, 2024).

Beginning in 2023, the U.S. also increased SSN port visits to Down Under, with Australian sailors joining U.S. crews for the training and development program designed to build operational proficiency on Virginia-class submarines (The White House, 2023a). To further implement AUKUS, the U.S. will also conduct Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) in early 2027. In SRF-West, the U.S. presents up to four U.S. Virginia class submarines in a rotation at HMAS Stirling near Perth, West Australia. These submarines are equipped with advanced propulsion systems— specifically an S9G pressurized water reactor providing virtually unlimited range—and weapons systems including Tomahawk cruise missiles and Mk-48 torpedoes. This rotational presence also involves the U.K., with one UK Astute class submarine joining the program. SRF-West aims to help Australia build operational capabilities and stewardship skills and operate its fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. The U.S. readies Australia to grow its defense and industrial workforce for SSN-AUKUS (The White House, 2023a).

To establish SRF-West, the U.S. and Australia finalized a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) case to obtain submarine training devices, including submarine training simulators. The U.S. will use the simulators to train Royal Australian Navy personnel on the U.S. Virginia Class

Submarines before Australia operates its own Virginia class submarines. The FMS case also facilitates training programs for Australian Defense and Industry personnel in the U.S. In March 2024, for example, 20 Australian industry personnel completed training at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility (The White House, 2024). In January 2024, 37 Royal Australian Navy sailors joined training in the USS Emory S. Land in Guam to gain the skills of maintaining submarines. The U.S. trained the Australian sailors on maintenance activity because Australia needed the skills to sustain US nuclear-powered submarines in preparing for the establishment of SRF-West (The White House, 2024).

According to Biden, SSN-AUKUS will become a best-in-class submarine for Australia's long-term defense needs. The president explained that SSN-AUKUS would also become Australia's future attack submarine. Therefore, the U.S. combined its advanced technology with the United Kingdom's submarine design to develop SSN-AUKUS. Australia will start building SSN-AUKUS in its domestic shipyards before the end of this decade, with the first Australian-built SSN-AUKUS coming to the Royal

Australian Navy by the early 2040s (The White House, 2023a).

In the implementation of AUKUS, the American government will also assist Australia in developing the capability of managing radioactive waste and nuclear fuel in its nuclear-powered submarine program. This assistance aims to help Australia securely manage radioactive waste domestically and follow nuclear non-proliferation obligations and commitments (The White House, 2023a). The U.S. collaborates with the U.K. to provide Australia with nuclear material in complete, welded power units. These power units will not require Australia to refuel during their lifetime. The U.S. ensures that Australia cannot use the nuclear fuel it receives for nuclear weapons, confirming that SSN-AUKUS will meet the highest non-proliferation standard. President Biden said:

> And I want to be clear. These subs are powered — not nuclear-armed subs. They're nuclear-powered, not nuclear-armed. Australia is a proud non-nuclear weapons state and has committed to stay that way. These boats will not have any nuclear weapons of any kind on them (The White House, 2023b).

To support the U.S. and AUKUS needs, the American government invests an

additional 2.4 billion dollars over the fiscal years of 2023 to 2027 in the submarine industrial base to increase construction capacity and meet U.S. national needs. The government also added 2.2 billion dollars to the submarine maintenance budget from 2024 to 2028 to improve the maintenance of Virginia Class Submarines. The Australian government also supports the American government by committing to invest in the U.S. submarine industrial base to speed up the delivery of the Virginia Class Submarines (The White House, 2023a).

It can be argued that AUKUS marks the revival of Pivot to Asia in American foreign policy. The launch of AUKUS in 2021 showed that President Joe Biden revived Pivot to Asia in the implementation of American foreign policy under his administration. Pivot to Asia refers to a strategic orientation in American foreign policy that focuses on the Asia-Pacific region. First introduced by former president Barack Obama in 2011, Pivot to Asia marked the shift in the U.S.' focus from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific in the implementation of Obama's foreign policy. In his foreign policy, Obama focused on Asia-Pacific to address the

rising influence of China and strengthen partnerships with emerging powers in Asia Pacific to reach American national interests in economy, politics, and military in the region (Llanos-Antczak, 2024; Ulung, 2013). Although the Pivot to Asia appeared to lose momentum after Donald Trump succeeded Obama, Biden, who served as Obama's vice president, revitalized it upon taking office through AUKUS. Biden said:

> The United States is a Pacific power, because we're on the Pacific Ocean. We are a Pacific power. The United States has safeguarded stability in the Indo-Pacific for decades to the enormous benefits of nations throughout the region, from ASEAN to Pacific Islanders to the People's Republic of China.

Kumar (2023) opined that AUKUS continues Obama's pivot strategy by seeking to balance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Biden administration recognized that China was rapidly shifting regional power dynamics in its favor—a development threatening U.S. national interests—and thus used AUKUS as a means to bolster Australia's military capabilities so it could assist America in countering China's assertiveness (Kumar, 2023).

Like Kumar, Wei (2022) says, AUKUS underscores how critical the Indo-Pacific is for U.S. security and prosperity goals. He explains that AUKUS embodies Biden's broader Indo-Pacific Strategy aimed at asserting America's role as an Indo-Pacific power with five key objectives: fostering a free and open region; enhancing connectivity within and beyond it; promoting regional prosperity; strengthening security frameworks; and building resilience against transnational threats. The U.S. established AUKUS as a crucial new partnership at the frontline of its security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, involving Australia in the partnership to help the U.S. reach the five objectives, including containing China (Wei, 2022, p. 6).

CONCLUSION

This research article found that the United States implemented AUKUS by preparing nuclear-powered submarines for Australia alongside training Australian military personnel both technically and operationally. The U.S. allocates a special budget and provides Australia with assistance and training programs to develop Australian human resources. This research contributes to enriching literature on AUKUS, arguing that this trilateral partnership showed the revival of Pivot to Asia in American foreign policy. However, this research has limitations. The major limitation is time constraints. This research explains how the American government implements the AUKUS pact, but the findings of its implementation were limited from 2021 to 2024. The lack of explanation on the implementation of AUKUS from 2025 onwards is a research gap that other researchers can try to fill in future research. Additionally, further research should explore how effective AUKUS has been at balancing Chinese power or deterring its actions within the Indo-Pacific arena.

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Post-Materialism in The US to The Acceptance of Religious LGBTQ+ in New Media

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the interaction between traditional and postmaterialist values, focusing on how personal growth, self-expression, and identity formation have challenged long-standing societal norms. Drawing on Ronald Inglehart's post-materialism theory and Judith Butler's theory of queer theory, this paper investigates how religious LGBTQ+ individuals—often referred to as "Religious Queer"—have attempted to assert their identity representations within religious communities and public media. Their presence in New Media has prompted several reactions, some strong and some supportive, as it disrupts conventional associations between religiosity and heteronormativity, challenging long-held norms, producing critical conversations, and inviting broader acceptance of diverse identities within spiritual and digital spaces. Through qualitative research, this paper examines how religious queer individuals deconstruct inherited interpretations of religion and assert that their gender and sexuality are not inherently incompatible with their faith. Therefore, this study explores how the intersection of postmaterialist values and queer identities enables a reimagining of religious belief and personal authenticity in New Media.

Keywords: *LGBTQ+; new media; post-materialism; queer; religious*

INTRODUCTION

Technology, communication, transportation, and trade improvements have fueled the ongoing global integration and interdependence process known as globalization. Globalization describes how countries, economies, and cultures throughout the world are interconnected and dependent on one another, erasing boundaries and forging a global web of connections. Fundamentally, globalization refers to strengthening interconnectedness between nations in the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres, leading to a global society.

Over the ages, globalization has expanded connectivity in both the economic and cultural spheres of life. However, the present state of affairs fundamentally differs from the past. Globalization is the increase in economic and cultural life over time due to global connectivity. However, many people think the present situation fundamentally differs from the past (Cuterela, 2012).

According to Turner (2010), globalization has impacted religion, particularly in the greater context. It examines how the world at significant influences change or is usually known by the transmission of existing religious ideas, the emergence of developing religious networks, and the negotiation of religious identity.

The growing interconnectedness and interdependence of religious communities define the "globalization of religion" phenomenon. Turner examines how religious organizations, concepts, and practices have been able to transcend national boundaries due to migration, technological advancements, and cultural exchanges. Due to globalization, religious traditions frequently undergo a process of adaptation and hybridization, which brings them into contact with many cultural influences. New religious identities and customs influenced by many cultural traditions began appearing. Religious institutions address the issues brought about by globalization, paying special attention to the emergence of religious fanaticism. Certain religious groups perceive the advancement of globalization as a challenge to their traditions and convictions, prompting fundamentalist groups to mobilize and oppose the purported drawbacks of globalization. Turner's explanation lays the foundation

for understanding the complex relationship between religion and globalization. The following subjects are discussed in this essay: the rise of post-secular culture, religious fanaticism, cultural hybridity, globalization of religion, and commercialization of religion.

Religion can be readily recognized as a human activity only within the reality that religion constructs for itself (Dow, 2007). It can be understood that the logic of all that follows is that if one believes in the existence of any story, deity, spirit, or other supernatural entity that a religion suggests. However, the majority of the beings—gods or otherwise—that form the foundation of religious belief and practice cannot have their existence confirmed through direct observation. Scientists believe human behavior is influenced by understanding why people act and think the way they do, not by myths. Science has discovered, among other explanations, that they behave as they do due to evolution.

The relationship between globalization and religion reveals a dynamic interaction that helps us understand the implications and transformations that may occur. Globalization, which was introduced at the beginning of the paragraph, mentions that there is an exchange of ideas and culture. Therefore, it is important not to dismiss the possibility that religion plays a significant role in the cultural exchange associated with globalization. As a deeply personal and widely shared belief system, religion is particularly susceptible to reinterpretation and broader influence in a global context. This raises questions such as: Could cultural exchange contribute to the emergence of new religious movements? Have existing religious movements arisen due to globalization? These and other related inquiries provide a compelling foundation for the development of this research.

The relationship between religions and globalization has significantly influenced the birth and growth of post-materialism. A change in the relationship between religion and the public sphere is called post-materialism, in which secular frameworks coexist with religious ideas and voices but with renewed significance and impact. This change is a reaction to the difficulties and transformations posed by globalization. This transformation in the public sphere, shaped by globalization and shifting values, has also brought attention to how

society addresses identity and inclusion issues, particularly gender and sexuality.

The existence of LGBTQ+ in society as a sexuality is a topic of tight discussion among conservatives. LGBTQ+ has historically been seen as a disease (Bronski, 2012). The differences between the versions show how the dominant social and cultural norms surrounding gender and sexuality at any moment are directly linked to the diagnosis of disease among LGBTQ+ individuals.

The relationships between religious identity and other identities and situations, especially those related to sexual identity are discussed in a book titled Queering Religion, Religious queers by Yvette Taylor, and Ria Snowdon (Taylor & Snowdon, 2014). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) young adults face a disproportionate risk of violence and distress, and religion is one of the therapies that help LGBTQ+ individuals in this regard. Compared to their heterosexual peers, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGBTQ+) teens report higher rates of abuse, victimization, and bullying. Additionally, young adults who identify as LGBTQ+ report higher rates of mental illness (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015). Thus,

the researcher has formulated questions: how has globalization contributed to the diversification of religion?, and how is the religious LGBTQ+ being represented and accepted in new media with the rise of post-materialism?.

New media is where people from many cultural backgrounds come together without obvious geographic borders (Adi, 2024). Traditional types such as those commonly used in different media do involve queers: either exclusions on the premise of association or completely distorted representations of the subject. Unlike such traditional media, the new media portals, including sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, have created spaces for other minority interests and voices to self-identify, narrate personal stories, and build networks of support. Indeed, for those queer and religious, these spaces offer a potent context for deconstructing the mainstream public narrative and for specifying their two identities to build broader understandings within a socioeconomic context. Digital storytelling and community building are ways in which the new media have become a significant resource for visibility and the redefinition of what it means to be queer

and religious in a post-materialist era.

Thus, this study examines how globalization has contributed to diversifying religious beliefs and practices in the United States and what implications this has for post-materialism. It also aims to see how religious LGBTQ+ rights are portrayed in various new media, such as social media and online forums, and to evaluate how accepting and tolerant religious communities are portrayed in these media. The researcher explores how developments and issues among the religious LGBTQ+ are represented in today's new media. With the many developments in religion, there have also been many changes. It is essential to see how LGBTQ people fight for the equality they deserve in new media.

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on analyzing religious queer using a qualitative approach, specifically within the framework of post-materialism. The study aims to explore how the episode constructs meaning around the connection between gender, sexuality, and religion examined in this study from a Queer Theory perspective offered by Judith Butler (Butler, 2002). As Butler deals with this subject, she critiques the traditional binary understanding of male and female gender as a socially constructed framework, which serves to reinforce heteronormative expectations. Within her theory, gender is not an innate identity but a performative act: the roles of "male" and "female" are continuously reconstituted and reinforced through the repetition of social behaviors, just as the performative definitions become effective. Whereas heteronormativity does not go challenged and queer constructions are fixed on their limits, queer identities vs. relationships sweep in outside heterosexual conformity. Such an approach gives insights into how LGBTQ+ people within such religious communities deconstruct traditional notions of gender and sexuality, providing for a richer understanding of identity in both the secular and faith-based fields.

This deconstruction of tradition is not necessarily an independent process; broader global shifts influence it. One of these, to be sure, is globalization and new value systems following Inglehart's post-materialist theory; such elements contribute to how individuals in society conceive of and express their identity.

Globalization and Inglehart's post-materialist theory have been related. According to the studies, as societies grow more interconnected due to globalization, people are exposed to a broader range of cultures, thoughts, and experiences (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). Materialist values emphasize acquiring material resources and give great weight to physical and financial well-being. It is emphasized that the other side of post-materialist ideas is about self-expression, which proves that it has more excellent value, a high quality of life, and satisfaction in high-level demands such as creativity, self-growth, and autonomy. According to Inglehart, if a country becomes richer, then the understanding of its population can change from materialist to post-materialist. The result is that many social and political problems arise, including opinions about authority, gender roles, environment, and individual autonomy, which are affected by this cultural transition.

Religious beliefs and practices have not escaped the theory of post-materialism. According to Inglehart, when society has begun to experience some changes in values, spiritual practices that have been carried out for years, commonly called traditional, will decrease, and because of this, religious individualism grows. Often, religious views and practices can vary more and have few formal ties to organizations known to have established religious existence.

This research prioritizes focus groups to conduct in-depth research on focus groups with individuals who are on a spectrum of being religious and also a part of the LGBTQ+ community in New Media. This research examines content posted on social media and other forms of New Media to understand how conversations around postmaterialist values, religion, and LGBTQ+ rights are represented there. The analysis aims to identify nuances in how these topics are discussed, debated, or even supported in digital spaces. In doing so, the research seeks to uncover how New Media challenges and reinforces societal attitudes, particularly regarding the visibility and acceptance of religious queer individuals in the context of shifting cultural values.

DISCUSSION

Religion has been significantly impacted by globalization, which is

characterized by the increased interconnection and interdependence of societies. The alteration of religious values, particularly the move away from conventional religious rituals and beliefs and toward more secular orientations, is a significant effect of globalization. This research investigates how globalization has altered religious beliefs and looks at the reasons that have contributed to these changes. Thus, the section is divided into two subsections. The first is the diversification of religious beliefs in the rise of post-materialism, which the researcher discusses in terms of the transition in religious value, the emergence of post-materialism, the emergence of diversification of beliefs, and the implications for religion in the United States on post-materialism. The second subsection is about religious LGBTQ+ representation in new media and the acceptance of their existence. It mainly discusses the findings of religious LGBTQ+ in the New Media, talking about their identity and how people saw those events.

Diversification of Religious Beliefs in the Rise of Post-materialism

There is a change from traditional values to secular ones. This secularization process contains changes that occur and involves globalization. The exchange of ideas, understanding, and culture in each country is one of the discussions here. Ronald's book, which explains Religion's Enduring Impact on the World's Societies, discusses how an area will follow its religious heritage (Inglehart, 2020). The title is a trigger and proof of globalization, which is why religion is an inheritance, but does not necessarily become an inheritance. Still, there is interference from the journey of the teachings of each country.

A society's trajectory is determined by the historical influence of its cultural heritage. This trajectory persists long after religious organizations have disappeared. Because of this, Protestant Europe still exhibits particular values and beliefs, even though few people attend church there. Both historically Roman Catholic and historically Islamic, Orthodox, or Confucian societies have this trait.

Globalization encapsulates the cultural differences in people's perspectives on various issues, such as politics, religion, sexual conventions, and work

attitudes. The shift from farming-based societies to industrial ones brought significant changes like secularization, urban living, organized systems, and more logical ways of thinking. These changes are reflected in the divide between traditional values and more modern, secular beliefs. Traditional civilizations have a strong emphasis on religion, which encourages large families and more respect for authority, rate relatively poorly in terms of success motivation, and oppose divorce, abortion, and homosexuality.

The conventional norms transitioning to rational secular norms here are in the realm of religion. The emergence of secular values and declining religious authority are effects of globalization. The worldview and the many alternative explanations that challenge religious orthodoxy today are very easy to find, access, and absorb by advocates such as science, technology, and secular education. As a result, people may take a more secular perspective and move on to support logic and facts that can be verified over religious dogma.

Globalization, in this case, cultivates an individualistic mindset, thus making many people doubt and reconsider the religious beliefs that they originally held. Many perspectives and lifestyles emerge as they interact with diverse cultures and emerging ideas. People are thus encouraged to critically reevaluate their views and make decisions that are highly consistent with their autonomy. Therefore, interpreting or modifying religious ideas to suit existing interests and lifestyles according to specific environments will lead to more secular attitudes.

The spread of secularism and the tone of other Western cultural norms are strongly linked to globalization. Western secular culture means the separation of the church, the emphasis on the rights and freedoms of the individual and the state, and the rise of consumerism, which has impacted the world and the countries.

Post-materialist principles include social equality, a sustainable environment, and, most importantly, human freedom, quality of life, and self-expression. According to Inglehart (2020), prioritizing non-materialistic goals in wealthier, safer communities is at the heart of post-materialism. Inglehart claims that several variables, all of which have a role to play in post-materialism, include socialization processes,

shifting generations, educational values, and exposure to new concepts. The post-materialist view is also based on the basis planted and grown by existing socialization processes, such as increasing gender equality, an issue that has been hot in every era until now, and the spread of democratic ideals. The socialization process, educational values, and exposure to new concepts are ways globalization works.

Inglehart's post-materialist theory looks at traditional values that oppose secular-rational, survival that opposes self-expression, and materialist perspectives that oppose post-materialism. Post-materialist principles lead to demands for more individual liberties, participatory democracy, environmental conservation, and the prioritization of social issues like gender equality and human rights. These ideals impact political attitudes, voting patterns, and societal social and cultural shifts.

The emergence of the understanding of post-materialism changed to a directionless concern with materialism. This is an impact of what might be called the change in understanding that has developed due to globalization. An example is how Inglehart included 43 countries in his research and then determined that those countries that still attach importance to materialism will enter countries that still uphold traditional values and are categorized as "poor" countries. Still, the rest that upholds self-expression are classified as "rich" countries. Therefore, from the understanding of Bryan S. Turner, there will be new religious identities and practices that borrow from other cultural traditions that begin to emerge, and all cultural exchanges and ideas that occur in the process of globalization will cause different results. The following discussion is part of the emergence of various beliefs caused by globalization, and what the other possible possibilities are. The discussion led to a diversification of beliefs discussed in the following paragraph.

The progress of religious diversity in the United States is inextricably tied to globalization movements. Globalization, defined by growing interconnection and the movement of ideas, goods, and people across national lines, has had a tremendous impact on the religious landscape of the

United States. Immigration significantly contributes to religious diversity in the United States (Cadge & Howard Ecklund, 2007). As a result of globalization, people from various cultural and religious backgrounds have moved to the United States. Immigrants bring their religious traditions and customs with them, resulting in the creation of religious groups from all over the world. As a result, religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and others have grown in popularity alongside traditional Christian denominations.

Religion and Globalization have promoted cultural interchange and interfaith discussion, allowing religious ideas and practices to cross-pollinate (Turner, 2010). Travel, media, and the internet have increased people's accessibility to and interest in diverse religious traditions. This has aided the emergence of ecumenical movements, interfaith projects, and spiritual discovery beyond traditional religious bounds.

Furthermore, globalization has challenged one religious tradition's dominance and given rise to religious pluralism in the United States (Eck, 2001). As people discover more religious options, they have more possibilities to study and choose their religious affiliations or engage in spiritual practices outside of institutionalized faiths. As a result, alternative spiritualities, new religious movements, and individualized displays of faith have grown in popularity.

Globalization has made it easier for religious people and leaders worldwide to connect and share their beliefs. These networks facilitate the global dissemination of religious concepts, practices, and beliefs, particularly in the US. Many factors affect the world's religious diversity today, some of which are widespread missionary efforts, religious organizations, and accessible religious materials and literature from around the world. A sign of the larger social environment and culture in which religion functions, this has played a role in the secularization of society, resulting in decreased loyalty to conventional religion and the emergence of some of the more diverse religious landscapes. Meanwhile, traditional religious institutions need to fight harder to attract more followers. Thus, new religious expressions that were still very taboo at that time became alternative spiritual paths

free to be learned. It is possible to conceptualize syncretism, hybridization, and cultural absorption as the interaction and adaptation of various religious communities to their new cultural context. Consequently, unique religious expressions arise that incorporate elements from other faiths and mirror the heterogeneity of society.

Thus, globalization has been critical in the rise of religious diversity in the United States. Immigration, cultural interaction, interfaith discussion, and global religious networks have all contributed to the country's presence and expansion of various religious traditions. Because of the interaction of international and local influences, a dynamic and complex religious landscape has emerged, reflecting the pluralistic nature of a globalized society. The changes in religious practices in the United States from materialism to post-materialism will be discussed in the following paragraph.

In the context of post-materialism theory, which emphasizes the shift from materialistic values to post-materialistic values, several religious practices in the United States have changed over time due to globalization.

Before the rise of post-materialism, several examples belong to materialism in religious practices, such as Prosperity Gospel, Mega Churches and Financial Success, Consumerism and Religious Commodification, Televangelism and Fundraising, and Religious Tourism and Commercialization.

The essentials of consumerism and religious commodification deal with how religion participates as an object of consumption and commodification. According to Ritzer, consumerism has penetrated practically every element of modern society, changing it into a consumer culture in which people are considered mainly consumers rather than religious believers (Ritzer & Dean, 2019). Consumerism has penetrated practically every element of modern society, changing it into a consumer culture in which people are mainly considered consumers rather than religious believers.

Consumerism has resulted in the commercialization and commodification of religious activities and beliefs. Religious institutions and organizations have adopted business-like techniques to attract and maintain believers. These methods include branding, marketing, and selling religious goods and services.

Ritzer thinks that consumerism has commercialized and commodified religious activities and beliefs. He claims religious institutions and organizations have adopted business-like techniques to attract and maintain believers. These methods include branding, marketing, and selling religious goods and services.

After realizing and increasingly shifting traditional values and starting to move towards self-expression and secular rational values, there was a shift in religious practices that shifted from materialism to post-materialism, which was explained by Inglehart's understanding. People will be more concerned with rational things towards themselves and will argue as freely as possible. Several religious practices developed in America due to this exchange of ideas that changed from traditional to free expression.

The US is undergoing a profound transformation in attitudes and objectives as it enters the post-materialist era. As they achieve increasing degrees of economic security, individuals' priorities shift away from financial requirements and toward self-expression, personal growth, and quality of life. This shift has profoundly impacted how religious activities are perceived, followed, and valued in the United States.

The implications of post-materialism in the US are essential in this research. These include the growth of individual spirituality that falls into the discussion of self-freedom, the search for meaning and authenticity, which also focuses on existing social equality and environmental management, and the problem of relevance in persistent religious institutions. Globalization, thus, has many consequences for post-materialism in religion, including shifting priorities; adaptation and cultural exchange; individualization and spirituality; global networks and movements; environmental issues; and pluralistic interreligious dialogue.

Some shifts in the goals of religious communities are a result of globalization. As previously understood, as societies grow more upward and victorious, networked people can prioritize post-materialistic goals such as spiritual fulfillment, self-expression, and personal growth over conventional materialistic values such as wealth and material possessions. This can cause individuals to reconsider their

religious beliefs more deeply and also begin to place an even greater emphasis on self-growth and inner experience.

Globalization has many diverse impacts. The most relevant here is how it facilitates the cross-border flow of religious activities and beliefs. It may shift or even change to attract new audiences when it adapts to different cultural contexts. The result here is that religious practices that could be hybrids may begin to emerge, including elements from various traditions or local cultural expressions. Therefore, the globalization process has facilitated the exchange of ideas, which has resulted in the evolution and diversification of religious practice.

Globalization can uphold the value of individuality and one's search for the spiritual path. When people choose and take a more personal approach to spirituality, it is the result of becoming more familiar with diverse religious practices and beliefs worldwide. The existing penchant for unconventional spiritual activities, so that the rejection of traditional religious institutions exists, or the creation of a very stagnant spiritual framework here with the emergence of

post-materialistic ideas, are some examples of this individualization.

Achieving social equality, promoting social sustainability, and enhancing human rights is the work of religious communities and organizations able to collaborate with like-minded people and organizations worldwide. This international network makes collaboration, resource sharing, and dissemination of post-materialistic concepts and behaviors possible.

A hopeful commitment to ecological sustainability and a deeper awareness of environmental issues are common characteristics of religious post-materialism. Globalization has led to global environmental challenges and the interdependence of ecological systems. Religious communities can incorporate environmental stewardship into their religious rituals and practices to support sustainable living and ecological justice.

The benefits of globalization here can also include increasing religious diversity and interfaith dialogue. Meeting with individuals with diverse religious backgrounds and perspectives casts doubt on

exclusivity and advances a more accepting understanding of religious pluralism. Post-materialistic principles encourage interfaith participation and collaboration on everyday social and ethical challenges, emphasizing cooperation, communication, and mutual understanding among various faith communities.

Thus, globalization affects post-materialism in religion by reorienting priorities, promoting cultural adaptation and exchange, fostering individualism and spirituality, facilitating global networks and movements, advancing environmental concerns, and fostering religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. These consequences highlight how spiritual practices and beliefs are changing in a post-materialistic, globalized world. After discussing the first question in the research question, we will discuss the second big point: religious LGBTQ+ individuals represented in new media and the acceptance of their existence.

This shift toward post-materialist values creates more space for diverse identities, including those that challenge traditional religious and cultural norms. In this context, the visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ individuals within spiritual communities, primarily through new media, reflect the growing emphasis on individual expression, inclusion, and personal spirituality.

In the USA TODAY YouTube channel, with a video titled LGBTQ Muslims tackle myths about their religion and sexuality, Marwa Eltahir, one of the activists in residence at the LGBTQ+ community center of NY, did an interview on the USA TODAY channel said "There's no one way to be Muslim, there's no one way to be queer." (USA TODAY, 2022, 00:04). Marwa acknowledged being a queer Muslim in the interview, bluntly saying that being two identities who did not expect to intersect with each other would be controversial.

In this case, according to Marwa as the speaker, it will be challenging to have two identities together, being queer will not be easy nor will be a Muslim, however, Marwa, said she prefers to excavate the things for her at the moment, what will be her at that time that she will embrace and said "I like to continue deepen my relationship with Islam, again, I'm bringing the joy into it." (USA TODAY, 2022, 00:12). Marwa's desire to deepen her understanding of

Islam appears to stem from an intrinsic need for psychological security. This aligns with the broader notion that religion often provides individuals with a sense of stability and reassurance. Her continued commitment to Islam can thus be interpreted as a response to her mental and emotional need for a consistent and secure foundation in life.

Then, Marwa declared something that was being shown as someone who wanted justice for her community. Such as "I've had my queer ancestors that didn't have the same privileges as me to be expressed in this way". (USA TODAY, 2022, 01:00). With New Media, this is more visible today and she feels safe to express herself as Muslim and queer. The part that feels acceptable about queer Muslims in the comments of the video is also essential to examine the aspects of the video that highlight social acceptance of queer Muslims, as reflected in the comments section in the following paragraph. A person with an account named @scarletwitch6058 supports this opinion by stating that everyone has a choice in religion.

Religion is everyone's choice. If they find some peaceful in it, then they will believe it. It's not based about gender, age, bisexuality. It's abt humans and they are humans. What mistake did they did to be sinful? If God is there and he knows what they are doing, he should forgive them if he didn't like it. Some people harm other people lives, they are the sinful persons. But they didn't harm any person. (Scarlet, 2022, as cited in [LGBTQ Muslims tackle myths about their religion and sexuality | USA TODAY]).

From the comment above, the comment from @scarletwitch6058 was one of hundreds of comments made for Marwa as the speaker, while the other called her sick, feared God, not being Muslim, and several other repulsions. When compared to some positive and negative comments, nasty comments are given to Marwa, and comments that sink below, making those who watch still believe that if these two identities are true, there will still be much criticism because the acceptance is drowned in it.

Despite the mixed reactions Marwa received, her story is not isolated. Similar expressions of queer religious identity appear on more personal platforms like TikTok, where individuals like some people share their experiences and challenge traditional narratives in a more intimate, yet equally impactful, way.

Olive, a student at Texas University, talks openly about being gay and Christian on TikTok. Moving to a more private opinion, namely a woman with a TikTok account @digital.olive, she conveyed in her video with an obvious sentence and very inviting comments that lead to two sides. It says, "Fun fact, you can be Christian and gay, you can be religious and gay". (Olive, 2024).

Unlike Marwa who instructs the difficulty of being Muslim and queer simultaneously and she remains Olive, she feels that her religion and her sexuality can become one because afterward, she said, "these two things are not mutually exclusive events. Praise God" (Olive, 2024). She said these two things are not exclusive events; they can be the same and cannot intersect. Religion and sexuality can happen in the same way, and possibly, Olive appeared on her TikTok account, which is New Media, by clearly declaring that she is Christian and Gay.

The acceptance from the comment column of the @digital.olive account, compared to the comment section on YouTube, looks very different. The berating and rejecting are rare, as the top 20 comments are those that support and accept the existence of @digital.olive, they say they feel comfortable on the right side of TikTok because the algorithm works well, they are relieved because some feel they find their community and feel safe. Some say they want to stay on the side of TikTok, which brings out their fellow communities. For negative comments, they repeatedly wrote that they don't understand the existence of gay Christians. There is a clear difference between the comment sections of YouTube and TikTok.

This contrast between platforms like TikTok and YouTube shows how different digital spaces shape the level of acceptance toward queer religious individuals. Expanding this to larger media platforms, we can see how organizations like Jubilee Media are also beginning to give visibility to identities that were once rarely acknowledged. A media corporation situated in Los Angeles is called Jubilee Media. As of January 2024, the Jubilee YouTube channel boasted approximately 8.5 million members. Jubilee invited a pastor who identified as gay and an important person in the church. Throughout the video, "I'm a Gay Pastor. Ask Me Anything". Just like the titles and types of videos Jubilee

offers, it allows everyone to ask their questions. Father Curt's appearance here represents that someone who is religious and part of the LGBTQ+ community exists.

Father Curt said something very influential for some of the people he would help, and he felt this had to be conveyed: "You know what? You don't have to give up. You don't have to allow people to dictate your path. You have the power to dictate your path" (Jubilee, 2022, 01:44).

For people who may feel they belong to the LGBTQ+ community and want to embrace a religion, there may be those who feel that it is not good and not worthy to be embraced at the same time, as if something is something that must be removed and let go of the other to run something well. However, for Father Curt, that is not true.

> I think that in the world that we live in today, we can be more gender fluid, and if you like it, you like it, make it work. So that's how the world needs to be, make it work. (Jubilee, 2022, 03:28)

Father Curt elaborates on the passage that in today's world, Jesus does that because that is how the world should be. That is, in the old world, nothing like this would have existed before there was enough resistance to traditional values for the LGBTQ+ community when they wanted to be religious, maybe they would have been roundly condemned. Still, Pastor Curt receives support that can open the church to everyone and accept them regardless of their sexuality.

The video featuring Pastor Curt elicited a mixed reaction from the public. Some support his view that religion is about how we act, not merely what we believe. Others commend his being there, saying that the presence of an openly gay pastor represents progress in encouraging religions to embrace and affirm those diverse identities within their communities. Sadly, for every affirmation, there is a counterpoint of denial. Many commenters are calling Pastor Curt a heretic, questioning his legitimacy as a religious figure, and some are going so far as to say that his identity is in contradiction to religious teachings. The glaring contrast between these two narratives highlights the divide between progressive and conservative strains of interpreting faith in the public square.

The most important things can be analyzed after analyzing three content items from

YouTube and TikTok. Someone with a religious nature and being part of the LGBTQ+ community is normal for some people because religion is not an exclusive event that cannot be related to their sexuality. Marwa from USA TODAY, Olive from a TikTok video, and Father Curt from Jubilee exist in the new media due to the rise of post-materialism. They deny the traditional value of the verses of each religion's scriptures that reveal the absence of their sexuality as human beings and how it becomes a value they do not accept. Then, with new media such as YouTube and TikTok, those who do not feel underrepresented feel their voices are heard.

Underrepresentation can be a disquieting and troubling experience, especially when it touches on identity facets beyond one's control. The sense of marginalization cannot be chosen, as it is nothing but a mirror for the workings of social structures. Hence, being visible and having a voice in society today is fundamentally important. Feeling seen and heard, and having a sense of inclusion, confirms one's place in the world and strengthens the fundamental right to exist without others validating or denying one's humanity.

CONCLUSION

The most important components can be reviewed after the three YouTube and TikTok contents have been examined. Father Curt from Jubilee, Olive from a TikTok video, and Marwa from USA TODAY are examples of new media resulting from the growth of post-materialism. They reject the conventional significance of the passages in the scriptures of every religion that show how their sexuality as human beings is absent and how it turns into a value they reject. Those who do not feel underrepresented believe their voices are heard thanks to modern media like YouTube and TikTok. Their presence and open appearance in the New Media show their underrepresentation in today's world. Religious queers proved their identity to open the eyes of the world that queer religion exists. Both events may intersect because religion has diversified and been modified in the United States. Seeing how their social media acceptance proves there are two sides, namely positive and negative. Positive from those who feel they have the same identity and feel safe with the existence of the community. Then the negative arises because of rejection that seems contrary to the teachings of their religion.

LGBTQ+ is not accepted in their faith, showing a steadfast commitment to the traditional values of their teachings. Therefore, this illustrates how queer religious individuals continue to negotiate a rather tough space, where acceptance and rejection often sit side-by-side. However, even online, among the increasing supportive voices that have begun to recognize and accept the connection between faith and queer identity, there is evidence of the kind of progress being made by society in these areas.

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1. Articles have not been published or accepted for publication, or are being considered for publication elsewhere. In addition to the manuscript, a written statement should be attached which clarifies that the article is original and does not contain any elements of plagiarism.

2. Types of article suitable for publication include the following; research report (laboratory, field, archives), conceptual ideas, studies, theory applications.

3. Articles are written in English using academic language along with standard academic writing structure and composition. Manuscripts are typed 1,15 spaced in a quarto paper size (A4), between 6000-7000 words in length including references, pictures, and tables.

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   Azhar & Matsumura, K. (2010). A study of "Kenry" in Japanese and "Hak" in Indonesian. *Jurnal Humaniora, 22*, 22-30.

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   David, A., & Simpson, J. (Eds.). (2006). *The Norton anthology of English literature: The Middle Ages* (8th ed.,Vol. A). W. W. Norton and Company.
   Denny, H., Nordlof., & Salem, L. (2018). "Tell me exactly what it was that I was doing that was so bad": Understanding the needs and expectations of working-class students in writing centers. *Writing Center Journal*, *37*(1), 67-98. **http://www.jstor.org/stable/26537363**

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As Rowe (2014) asserts, "'Transnationalism' also refers to American Studies done by international scholars outside the U.S. especially scholarship that emphasizes the influence of the U.S. abroad" (p. 1).

This research assigns the researcher to be the key instrument in his or her own research (Creswell, 2009, p. 211).

The New York Times (2020) interviewed their gay readers to reveal about the dynamics of gay relationship:

I am in a same-sex relationship, and we are regularly flummoxed by how our heterosexual parent friends don't split nighttime child care and sleep loss…In our house, parents are parents. There is no artificial distinction like fathers do this and mothers do that.

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