

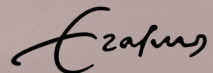
Erasmus School of  
History, Culture and  
Communication

# History Collective

ERASMUS STUDENT JOURNAL  
OF HISTORY STUDIES

Volume 2, May 2024

Erasmus University Rotterdam

The Erasmus University logo, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.



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



**History Collective: Erasmus Student Journal of History Studies**

Volume 2, Issue I

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# Editorial Letter

## Dear readers,

It is our utmost pleasure to present you the second volume of *History Collective: Erasmus Student Journal of History Studies*. Before introducing what you, our readers, should expect to find in this edition, we would like to extend our gratitude to the people that have made it come to life. Above all, we would like to thank the members of the ESHCC History department and our most esteemed advisory board, in particular, Dr. Yuri van Hoef and Dr. Daniel Curtis, for their endless support and guidance. Next, we would like to thank our authors, whose insightful research and passion for history have made this publication possible, for their trust and cooperation during the peer-review process. Finally, we would like to thank you, our readers, for your continued interest in our journal. Whether you are reading this volume on your mobile phone or laptop, or you have stumbled upon our journal in a library and are holding the physical copy in your hands right now, we hope you enjoy the second volume of *History Collective*.

We launched this journal with the intent to encourage students and history enthusiasts to share their research through an inclusive, accessible platform. The support we have received from students and faculty members alike since our first publication has been remarkable, and we have been working tirelessly to improve our outreach. In the past months, we have welcomed new editorial members who are excited about our core values and intent on making this journal even more accessible, diverse, and inclusive. With their dedication and new perspectives, they will ensure that we create a medium that can make a positive societal impact. Our correspondence with other history-oriented student journals in the Netherlands and elsewhere has similarly shown us the potential of this medium and we feel has reaffirmed our vision. Thus, this volume also includes a conversation with Alex Cooper-Williams the current Editor-in-Chief for *Footnote Journal*, our twin journal published by the University of Queensland History Society.

This volume was organised around the theme *Borders*, the full theme letter of which is also included at the beginning of this volume. From the spatial boundaries of states, the frontiers of knowledge and belief systems, to the lines of social and cultural difference drawn between groups of people, *borders* refer to a wide range of topics pertinent for historical research. We invited our authors to problematize this concept of borders, and to uncover the intricate historical relationships between power, territory, and human



interactions that remain contentious to this day.

When we came up with this volume's theme, the significance of borders in contemporary discourse was not lost on us. However, we did not anticipate the extent to which borders would become the focal point of global attention and media. With settler colonialism and dispute over land killing tens of thousands of people in Gaza in the last couple of months, it is clear that borders and their historical meanings are more topical than ever. Therefore, it is crucial that there are academic platforms where these topics can be discussed without fear or censorship.

As historians, we are tasked not only with understanding and narrating the past but also with analysing its connection to the present. Accelerating injustice, colonialism, ethnic cleansing, wars, discrimination, anti-immigration policies, and racist discourses of the present day unfolding before us serve as a reminder that the notion of borders—both physical and metaphorical—remains deeply entrenched in our world. They delineate not only geographical territories but also political affiliations, cultural identities, and socio-economic disparities. In exploring the theme of borders within the pages of this journal, our authors do not only recount historical accounts but engage in a broader dialogue about the implications of visible and invisible lines drawn on maps through a historical lens. We invite you, our readers, to join us on this journey through time and space, between power, territory, conflict, exchange, and human interactions.

In *The Arab Question*, Youssor al Hedni delves into the intricate dynamics of racialization faced by the Mizrahi Jews within the Israeli context, shedding light on the historical, socio-economic, and political factors that have shaped their struggle for rights and identity formation. Through an interdisciplinary analysis of visual language, as well as theoretical frameworks by Edward Said, Paulo Freire, and Jacques Derrida, this article uncovers the complex interplay between Ashkenazi hegemony, Orientalist perceptions, and Mizrahi experiences.

In *Comanche Influence vs Spanish Borders*, Juan Dominguez Garcia reexamines the role of subaltern actors in international relations through focusing on the Comanche's rise to dominance in the Great Plains during the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century. By analysing the role of horse culture, raids, and trade, the article highlights how the Comanche crafted a powerful and borderless yet cohesive society that diverges from the traditional concept of the nation-state.

In *Bending the Truth*, Isabelle de Jong explores how the United States employed anti-Soviet rhetoric to build a diplomatic relationship with Ukraine. Using Foucault's concept of parrhesia to examine how governments use and shape 'truth', the article analyses two investigations into the Ukrainian Famine, one done by the United States and one by

an independent organisation. Through this, the article analyses the idea of 'truth' and how it was used by the United States government to further their own political agendas in the late twentieth century. Inspired by the ongoing invasion of Ukraine by Russia, *Bending the Truth* explores how the United States relationship with Ukraine began over their common enemy on Ukraine's eastern border.

In *The Interpretation of Greek Virtue Ethics in Classical Islamic Philosophy*, Wyatt Top discusses the translation and adaptation of Ancient Greek philosophy in the Islamic Golden Age by thinkers Miskawayh and al-Ghazali. Through a comparison of their respective interpretations of Aristotelian ethics, the article illustrates the role of religious cosmology in producing ethical thought and sheds light on the complex process of revival and reinvention that traverses spatial, temporal, and intellectual borders.

We hope that the second volume of *History Collective* will spark further reflection and dialogue amongst our readers. It has been a pleasure developing this volume and we are more than excited to see it all coming together. Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to remind our readers that our submissions are now open year-round, and all history students and enthusiasts across the world are welcome to submit their works.

Best,  
*History Collective Editorial Board*

# Theme Letter

## Dear readers,

When was the last time you encountered a border?

Most commonly, we experience borders as a physical boundary between spaces. They are easily disregarded until we attempt to travel across, and suddenly our belonging is questioned, affirmed, or rejected. In the news, we encounter borders as sites of geopolitical conflict. Wars are waged over land disputes, indicating that in defining what is or is not a legitimate border, there is more at stake than the material ground itself.

With this, we are delighted to introduce you to the theme of the next volume of History Collective: **Borders**.

From a historical perspective, the emergence of state borders is linked to the notion of a sovereign nation-state. Borders provide the framework for the organisation of territories and the establishment of political authority. They also distinguish between citizens and non-citizens. In *The Invention of the Passport* (2018) John Torpey argues that the nation-state has monopolised the legitimate 'means' of movement, depriving people of the freedom to move freely (across borders) without state authorization. The passport, used to effectively track and identify each person, demarcates those who do and do not belong. On a smaller scale, segregation and redlining maintain similar borders within a city.

Beyond their tangible manifestations, borders also assume conceptual and symbolic dimensions as frontiers of knowledge and belief systems, meaning that borders are not only geographically located, but encompass social and cultural dimensions. In the seminal *Imagined Communities* (1983) Benedict Anderson argues that nations are collective imaginings of community and products of historical processes, rather than fixed entities. The rise of print capitalism, specifically the dissemination of newspapers, novels, and other printed materials in vernacular languages, played a central role in fostering a sense of community and shared identity, creating a new form of belonging based on the nation-state.

Historiography itself is central to the process of nation-building, binding individuals together in a common understanding of their past. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism*



*and Schizophrenia* (1987) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari further argue that history is written from a sedentary perspective and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, or at least a possible one. Scholars have thus attempted to overturn this methodological bias through transnational or global histories.

Whether investigating the role of borders in the formation of nation-states and the legacies of colonial borders, examining the experiences of borderland communities, or analysing the implications of border-crossing in the context of diasporas and migration, borders thus present an opportunity to explore a range of historical topics. With this theme, we embark on a journey through time and space, unravelling the intricate relationships between power, territory, and human interactions. We invite our authors to challenge preconceptions surrounding borders, embrace nuance, and explore the histories of conflict, triumph, travel, exchange, trade, heritage, community, and culture that are intrinsically linked to the concept of borders.

Best,  
*History Collective Editorial Board*

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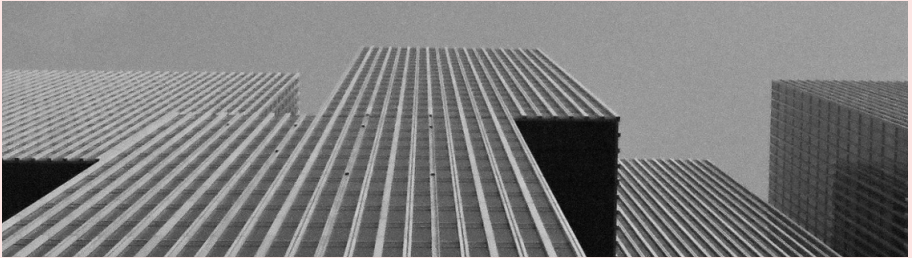
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DON'T MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF ME AGAIN!  
OH, GENTLEMEN, PROPHETS,  
DON'T ASK THE TREES FOR THEIR NAMES  
DON'T ASK THE VALLEYS WHO THEIR MOTHER IS  
FROM MY FOREHEAD BURSTS THE SWORD OF LIGHT  
AND FROM MY HAND SPRINGS THE WATER OF THE RIVER  
ALL THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE ARE MY IDENTITY  
SO TAKE AWAY MY PASSPORT!

- MAHMOUD DARWISH



# **The Arab Question**

Analysing the Racialisation of the Mizrahi  
and its Contribution to their Struggle for  
Rights and Identity Formation in Israel

*By Youssor al Hedni*

## Abstract

This paper aims to explore the racialisation of the Mizrahi Jews as a part of the formation of the Israeli state and the new Israeli identity, distinctly different from earlier established Jewish diasporic identities. The creation and upholding of this new identity was accompanied by a stark socio-economic division between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi migrants, which in turn became fertile soil for internal tensions in between moments of rising external threats. These tensions would eventually culminate into the Israeli Black Panther movement during the 1970s, leading into a major turning point in Israeli politics and some increased rights for the Mizrahi over time. In this article, the Mizrahi struggle for rights was studied through a combination of an analysis of visual language in photographs taken of the Israeli Black Panther protests and the application of theories of Edward Said, Paulo Freire, and Jacques Derrida.

## Introduction

Since the formal establishment of the state of Israel on May 14th 1948 in occupied Palestine by David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, controversies have plagued and surrounded the state. The immediate tensions following the state's formation and the subsequent conflicts with the surrounding Arab nations are matters that are well known to the global public and have thus been recognisable topics of debate. These external threats and hostile surroundings were not, however, the only issues that the Israeli government had to contend with, as there also existed intra-Jewish tensions that finally fully surfaced during the early 1970s. Following some years of relative

stability after the conclusion of the Six-Day War in 1967, starting in 1971, a wave of protests and activism by the Israeli Black Panther movement shook the political foundations of the nation. This essay will aim to study these internal issues by analysing the relationship between European and Arab Jews in Israel and the social, cultural, and political environment that led to the Israeli Black Panther protests in order to answer how the racialisation of Arab Jews in Israel contributed to their struggle for rights and how it has affected Jewish diasporic politics and identities

## The Birth of the Arab Question

In order to understand the case of the Israeli Black Panthers, one must first understand that the Israeli population is made up of a number of Jewish diasporas that have migrated there after many generations of being parts of disparate communities in different parts of the world. In this case, the most relevant groups were the Ashkenazi and Sephardic, later renamed the Mizrahi communities, or "the European Jews and Oriental Jews", as they were commonly referred to in contemporary terms.<sup>1</sup> The Ashkenazim are the European Jews who established Israel after the end of England's colonial mandate in 1948, choosing to leave the continent behind them following the horrors they had endured during WWII. This migration from Europe to the new Jewish state was later followed by the migration of Jews from other diasporas, such as the North-African Sephardim who had managed to establish their communities there following the

<sup>1</sup> Amos Elon; Tel Aviv, 'The Black Panthers Of Israel', *The New York Times*, 12 September 1971, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/09/12/archives/the-black-panthers-of-israel-israels-black-panthers.html>.



expulsion from their then native Spain in 1492.<sup>2</sup> Sephardic, a term which linked these 'Oriental Jews' to Europe through the implication of a Spanish heritage, came to be replaced by the term Mizrahi, the Hebrew word for Oriental, during the 1990s as it more accurately covered a people who had already established their communities across the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> The establishment of a uniquely Arab Jewish culture occurred long before even the earliest wave of Ashkenazi migration towards what was then Ottoman Syria in the late nineteenth-century. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the wave of European Jewish migrants to the region concurrently became the dawn of the Mizrahi discourse within Zionist-Ashkenazi circles.<sup>4</sup> This Mizrahi discourse refers to the manner in which this community has been discussed in regard to their interaction with and integration within the Israeli state.

The discourse surrounding the Mizrahi was more often than not grounded in Orientalist perceptions of the Arab world,<sup>5</sup> which naturally extended to the Mizrahi as they had been living amongst Muslim Arabs for such a long time that it had influenced their culture and customs.<sup>6</sup> Orientalism, as described by Edward Said (1935-2003) in his 1978 book by the same title, represents the Orient as something inherently different from the West, creating a contrast of the civilised Western Self against the barbaric Eastern

2 Jacob Rader Marcus and Marc Saperstein, *The Jews in Christian Europe: A Source Book, 315-1791* (n.p: Hebrew Union College Press, 2015), 181.

3 Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999): 13-14.

4 Moshe Behar, "1911: The Birth of the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no. 2 (4 May 2017): 313.

5 Alan Dowty and Yitzhak Epstein, "A Question That Outweighs All Others: Yitzhak Epstein and Zionist Recognition of the Arab Issue," *Israel Studies* 6, no. 1 (2001): 35-36.

6 Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," 9.

Other.<sup>7</sup> Said argued that this type of representation served as a support for the Western subjugation of the non-Western world,<sup>8</sup> and traces of such sentiments appeared to be plentiful within Ashkenazi intellectual circles as far back as the early twentieth-century. This was even the case in Yitzhak Epstein's influential 1907 piece *A Hidden Question*, in which he aimed to stress to other Zionists that they were to respect both the individual and national rights of the Arab people in order to successfully establish a Jewish state in the region.<sup>9</sup> Despite this speech-turned-essay attempting to recognise the depth of the Arab identity, passages which paint the Arabs as a simple people who would welcome the arrival of the Jews are still plentiful. Examples of such sentiments take shape in phrases such as "hundreds of villagers will come to request the Jews to take over their land" and "Palestine is now living in the sixteenth-century", creating an illusion of Arabs anticipating the arrival of Zionism as "day of salvation and redemption."<sup>10</sup> This perception of Arabs and by extension Arab Jews aided in establishing a situation wherein the Mizrahi would find themselves struggling to fit into the mould of the Zionist ideal, which they had previously believed would be a pan-Jewish ascent towards a brighter future. Instead, they were cast as outsiders who were unable to match the envisioned bastion of Western progress in the Middle East that Israel was predicated upon.<sup>11</sup> Evidence can be found across statements made by prominent Ashkenazi of the time, with the most notable being from the first Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion

7 Michiel Leezenberg and Gerard de Vries, *History and Philosophy of the Humanities: An Introduction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 334-335.

8 Leezenberg, "History and Philosophy," 334.

9 Dowty, "A Question That Outweighs All Others," 36.

10 Dowty, 82.

11 Alex Lubin, "Black Panther Palestine," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981-) 35, no. 1 (2016): 82.

stating that “we do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are in duty, bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallised in the (European) Diaspora.”<sup>12</sup>

The Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire argued in his seminal 1968 book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that during early stages of their struggle, those who were once oppressed tended to themselves become sub-oppressors of sorts rather than strive for true liberation. He argued that these sub-oppressors’ thoughts were shaped by the oppression that they themselves had experienced, causing them to inadvertently fall into the same type of behaviour they once sought to be liberated from.<sup>13</sup> This apparent distrust of Arabic influences on the Mizrahi could also be detected in the fact that they were barred from holding any political office despite being officially recruited by the new Jewish state in those early years. Such exclusionary politics served the singular purpose of propagating the Mizrahi’s status as second rate citizens beyond a doubt.<sup>14</sup> Freire pointed out that for an oppressor, the term ‘human being’ is something that is only applicable to themselves, other people being little more than ‘things’.<sup>15</sup> This type of attitude certainly echoed through in the way in which Mizrahi migration was discussed. Moreover, phrases such as “the Mizrahi element can be used a lot, as their material requirements are not too large” were not uncommon.<sup>16</sup> Freire continued to point out that for the oppressor there only

mattered one right, which was their right to live peacefully, only tolerating the survival of the oppressed because the existence of the oppressed necessitates the means which allows them to exist in this manner.<sup>17</sup>

## The Mizrahi Reality

Unlike the Ashkenazi settlers who were economically advantaged and well-educated, the Mizrahi immigrants came into the nation under drastically different circumstances. Prior to the formation of Israel, during the British colonial mandate in Palestine, a certain favouritism in migration was already in place. The bulk of the immigration quota in this period was allotted to European Jews, limiting the influx of Mizrahi Jews to a mere 10 percent of the total population of Jewish immigrants.<sup>18</sup> The racial segregation did not end there; Mizrahi citizens seemingly did not enjoy the same rights that their Ashkenazi counterparts did, as their children were for instance not allowed to attend Zionist Ashkenazi schools.<sup>19</sup> This disenfranchisement did not come to an end after the expiration of the colonial mandate, and the limited access to education, relegation to exclusively manual labour, and little to no choice when it came to housing carried on as the Israeli state was established and expanded in the following decades. The Mizrahi were not included in the allocation of the prime real estate options that the government constructed in recent years and were instead assigned to live in overcrowded, repurposed houses of the dispossessed Arabs in occupied neighbourhoods such as Jerusalem’s Musrara.<sup>20</sup> If they were

12 Lubin, “Black Panther Palestine,” 88.

13 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 45.

14 Lubin, “Black Panther Palestine,” 88.

15 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 57.

16 Lubin, “Black Panther Palestine,” 87.

17 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 57.

18 Lubin, “Black Panther Palestine,” 87.

19 Lubin, 87.

20 Lev Luis Grinberg, *Mo(ve)Ments of Resistance: Politics, Economy and Society in Israel/Palestine 1931-2013* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 171.

not placed in the slums, then the Mizrahi often found themselves allocated to live in the colonial borderlands, placing them directly in an antagonistic position with the Palestinians.<sup>21</sup> I argue that the idea behind this was to avoid any possible Mizrahi-Arab solidarity by putting them into direct conflict with one another. It was clear what the intention was when including these people in the early stages of state formation despite their seemingly undesirable non-Western attributes and lifestyles: cheap labour forces who were meant to replace the Palestinian workers coming in from the occupied regions.<sup>22</sup> Similarly to how Freire described the impoverished class in his native Brazil, the Mizrahi were never encouraged or equipped with the knowledge and skill to understand and react to the realities they faced. Instead, their realities ensured that they remained submerged in a position in which a critical awareness of their situation was near impossible.<sup>23</sup>

Once they had arrived in Israel, the Mizrahi found themselves placed in an entirely new dynamic that put them between an Israeli Jewish and Arab Jewish identity. In this new context they discovered that they would never truly be considered part of the Zionist ideal, while simultaneously losing their place in the collective Arab identity due to the strongly deteriorated relationship with the Muslim majority.<sup>24</sup> This meant that these Mizrahi were trapped in a situation where they were unable to return to the lands that they had abandoned in favour of the dream presented to them by Zionism, while apparently also unable to better their own

conditions in Israel. They were tolerated, as the cheap labour they offered became a sort of commodity with which the stuttering Israeli economy could be aided, rather than being welcomed into the Israeli melting pot. The way in which these people existed within society appears strikingly similar to the way in which the Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida deconstructed the concepts of tolerance and hospitality. Derrida concluded that tolerance could be considered the highest form of charity. Within the interaction between the tolerated and the tolerator there is an implied notion that one is not equal to the other; the tolerated party is implicitly placed in a position of subordination.<sup>25</sup> This interaction, much like the Orientalist arguments made against Mizrahi immigration to Israel in the years surrounding the state's founding, implies and justifies a superior image of the Self to the Other. Derrida also stressed that the nature of tolerance implies that there exists a limit after which this granted tolerance to a group may be rescinded.<sup>26</sup> The Mizrahi existed precisely in this space of scrutinised tolerance in which they were 'allowed' to exist so long as they did not stray too far from what was their intended place in society. This was a far cry from the concept at the other end of the spectrum: hospitality. As Derrida put it: "pure or unconditional hospitality does not consist in such an invitation. Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited".<sup>27</sup>

## Mizrahi Discontent and the Black Panthers

While it has been established that this

21 Lubin, "Black Panther Palestine," 91.

22 Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," 9–10.

23 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30.

24 Anis Mustafa Al-Qasem, "Arab Jews in Israel: The Struggle for Identity and Socioeconomic Justice," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 8, no. 3 (2015): 323–24.

25 Mengwei Yan, "Tolerance or Hospitality?," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7, no. 1 (2012): 156.

26 Yan, "Tolerance," 156.

27 Yan, 156–57.



socioeconomic gap between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi dates back as far as the interaction between these two former diasporas, it was difficult for the Mizrahi to effectively voice their concerns. Being slotted into a position of complete dependency and subordination, they were afforded no tools to organise and gain any influence within Israeli society.<sup>28</sup> While there have been some Mizrahi efforts at political action, and therefore attempts at changing the social circumstances they found themselves entrenched in, these moments were relatively sparse and never managed to gain any real traction.<sup>29</sup> The most notable of these pre-1970s moments of Mizrahi resistance against the Ashkenazi establishment was the Wadi Salib uprising starting on July 8th 1959 in Haifa. This particular demonstration was especially relevant as a spiritual precursor to the later Black Panther protests. Much like was the case for the Panthers, the Mizrahi outrage in this instance was catalysed into action in Haifa after the placement of recent Eastern European immigrants in newly constructed, comfortable housing while the Mizrahi were condemned to live under terrible conditions in overcrowded slums.<sup>30</sup> The protest march quickly escalated to violent clashes between protestors and police forces, which lasted for three weeks, until finally being broken up by police reinforcements and border guards. Besides arresting the protest's figureheads, the government also launched a campaign of ideological delegitimation by releasing statements such as "only a confirmed enemy of the Jewish people could have invented

28 Deborah Bernstein, "Conflict and Protest in Israeli Society: The Case of the Black Panthers of Israel," *Youth & Society* 16, no. 2 (1984): 130.

29 Bernstein, "Conflict and Protest," 131.

30 Joseph Massad, "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 60.

this treacherous and corrupting deed of inflaming group against group" en masse.<sup>31</sup> The Mizrahi's apparent passiveness in restoring their agency for such a long time appears striking until one considers how deeply the racialisation of the Mizrahi had penetrated their collective consciousness and shaped their identity. This racialisation was then further rooted in the fact that the ideology behind Israel's formation was based on a logic consisting of 'chosenness' and manifest destiny, leading many of the Mizrahi to accept their situation as a 'God-given structure' and continued to live underprivileged lives for some time.<sup>32</sup>

In the period between the 1959 uprising in Wadi Salib and the Black Panther protests of 1971, the matter on most Israelis' minds was external security. The ever-looming outside threat of the neighbouring Arab nations brought public attention away from Mizrahi matters by uniting the Israeli people against a clear enemy. The people were presented with an enemy that was easy to Other through religious context rather than solely racial or social means. After Israel's victory in the Six-Day War and the August 1970 ceasefire with Egypt in the War of Attrition, there was once again space to focus on internal matters.<sup>33</sup> Once again, tensions between the Mizrahi and the government rose significantly between 1969 and 1970 after newly arrived European immigrants received various benefits as an attempt from the government to encourage migration to Israel from wealthy nations. The fact that these financial opportunities were never presented to the Mizrahi population, along with the exceedingly warm and attentive reception of the new immigrants from both the government

and national media, exacerbated the

31 Massad, "Zionism's Internal Others," 60.

32 Lubin, "Black Panther Palestine," 90.

33 Bernstein, "Conflict and Protest," 132–133.

Mizrahi's disenfranchisement and unrest amongst the population.<sup>34</sup> Near the end of 1970 this discontent finally took shape in Jerusalem's Musrara neighbourhood as the local Mizrahi youth organised under a banner that they had adopted from the American Black Panther movement for social rights, having witnessed the impact of their activism during the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> Inspired by the American Black Panthers and other anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements of the era, the Mizrahi youth sought to reframe the spirit of the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, Black internationalist movements into their own context. This effectively translated their struggles into a global language and helped frame their plight into one of a global social movement rather than contained within the national context, as was the case for the Wadi Salib riots.<sup>36</sup> They were effectively able to position their exclusion from Israeli society in this context through the concepts of class conflict and race, as they very much coincided with the U.S. Black Panthers and their own struggle for social rights.<sup>37</sup> According to Reuven Abergil, cofounder of the Israeli Black Panthers, the Israeli state worked in a very similar manner to the United States in terms of race, with both countries creating a class of Black underemployed and vulnerable labourers who were intended to replace an indigenous class. As he very aptly put it, "the Black Panther Party fit Mizrahim just like Zionism fit America."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the choice to adopt the Black Panther name had the desired effect in a national context as well, as it caused a shockwave within the national discourse and for the first time brought

a sense of legitimisation to a national protest movement in Israel. Prior to this, a protest of this nature would not have received the same public reception, as the discourse was still so centred on protecting the state project that this would have been considered a betrayal.<sup>39</sup> The government's response to this was to promptly attempt to delegitimise the movement by refusing to grant the Panthers a permit for their first protest, as well as arresting all of the movement's leaders in an effort to immediately cast them as criminals and threats to the state's security.<sup>40</sup> Despite these arrests and lack of permit, the Panthers managed to spread their message through leaflets calling for "an end to discrimination" and "an end to deprivation", and amassed a crowd of 200-300 people to participate in their first protest, most of them being students and intellectuals.<sup>41</sup> In the end they managed to organise four protests between March and May of 1971 before entering a period of stagnation due to organisational difficulties and frustrations amongst their followers over a lack of full conceptualisation of their ideals.<sup>42</sup> The Black Panthers attempted to reignite their project by rebranding into a political party in order to gain substantial influence within the government in the years that followed. This finally crystallised after a merge with the Israeli labour party during the 1973 elections, where they ultimately received 1.6% of the votes, which allowed them to place three representatives on the Executive Committee. Not long after these elections, war broke out once again and public attention was diverted to the issue of security again, creating

34 Bernstein, "Conflict and Protest," 132.

35 Lubin, "Black Panther Palestine," 78.

36 Lubin, 80-81.

37 Lubin, 79.

38 Lubin, 90.

39 Noa Hazan, "The Elasticity of the Color Line," *Cultural Dynamics* 5, no. 1 (March 2013): 51.

40 Bernstein, "Conflict and Protest," 134.

41 Bernstein, 133-34.

42 Bernstein, 137.

a situation reminiscent of the years before the protests. Most importantly though, it seemed like proper political conceptualisation formed the biggest hurdle for the Panthers, as the spark that ignited never managed to grow into a flame.<sup>43</sup> This becomes especially apparent when studying an interview with Kokhavi Shemesh, a former figurehead within the organisation, from 1976. Despite the interview being held several years after the Panthers' first foray into politics, the answers remained mostly ambiguous and non-concrete when asked about the Panther's political vision. Furthermore, it is the apparent division within the party on some of the larger topics, such as the connection between the Mizrahi and Palestinian struggle, that seemed the most foreboding in regard to the party's potential success and stability. Instead, the interview appeared to be mostly Shemesh pointing out the problems that existed in Israeli society without an offer of potential solutions.<sup>44</sup>

## Framing the Black Panthers

Despite immediately bringing forth a change in attitude amongst the Israeli public, the manner in which the protests and the movement itself were represented in Israeli media certainly did nothing to aid them in achieving this. By analysing images from Israeli newspapers of the era, one can discern a clear separation between the protestors and the public, who were personified by the police officers in this type of imagery by use of racialised visual signifiers.<sup>45</sup> The choice of how to present a people or an event in an image through visual language is

intimately tied to ideology. Through this created separation between the public and the protestors, the good and the bad, ideological constructions regarding nationalism and identity can easily be created and enforced.<sup>46</sup> The way in which photographs of the Black Panthers protests were presented in Israeli media could be interpreted as nothing short of a spectacle of power, wherein the imagery of police force served to embody the domineering power of Whiteness over the unruly, chaotic Mizrahi protestor.<sup>47</sup> Figures 1 and 2 display excellent examples of this coverage, showing the police in conflict with the protestors. It is interesting to note how the manner in which the police are represented allowed for the viewer to more easily identify with them due to the fact that no identifiable characteristics are visible. What one is able to gather from these images is that the police represented order and progress, being more organised and having the means to uphold this status quo. A division between the White police and the Black protestors is not immediately created, but it is also immediately connected to the binary power relation of the ruler and the ruled.<sup>48</sup> The way in which these images were framed becomes even more interesting when compared to the way in which the Mizrahi were represented in images of the Six-Days War. Instead of being represented as Others, as unruly, violent criminals to be subdued, they were painted as part of the White Israeli Jewish identity. In images such as Figure 3, they were instead shown to be a part of the larger whole, a part of the progress that Israel brought to the region. This was also effectively demonstrated through the military technology on display with them.

43 Bernstein, 137.

44 Shalom Cohen and Kokhavi Shemesh, "The Origin and Development of the Israeli Black Panther Movement," *MERIP Reports*, no. 49 (1976): 19–22.

45 Hazan, "The Elasticity," 49.

46 Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.

47 Hazan, "The Elasticity," 50.

48 Hazan, 51.

Furthermore, presenting the Mizrahi in a situation of unity rather than conflict with the Ashkenazi helped strengthen the image of a united Jewry in Israel.<sup>49</sup> Contrasting representations of the same group in such a short time span show that the meaning of Whiteness is something not set in stone. Noa Hazan, a scholar of visual culture, described Whiteness as a “split, multifaceted ethnic identity, culturally and historically shaped as a violent force that denies those who differ from it”,<sup>50</sup> which is a perfect description of the situation that the Mizrahi and many other oppressed peoples have found themselves in.

A final aspect to be highlighted in the coverage of the Panthers’ protests was the difference between the photographs that would appear in the newspapers and those that were taken by amateur photographers. While the media’s focus on the violent aspects of the protests could be discerned from a first glance at a set of such photographs, another facet to distinguish was the fact that in none of the news photographs can one gain an understanding of the Panther’s message. Instead, the viewer is coerced into an image of the protest focussed solely on violence and the subjugation of criminals. Not a single photograph portrayed the banners they carried, demanding equal treatment and an end to racism. Instead, the coverage managed to fully dehumanise the protestors and represent them as enemies of the state.<sup>51</sup> Due to this, one would be unable to form a coherent view of how these protests played out and what circumstances set the events in motion. This in itself was an active act of silencing the oppressed, an attempt at controlling the narrative.

When instead, one studies pictures taken of the protests by amateur photographers an entirely different image is presented. As can be observed in figure 4, the protestors can be seen marching through the streets in an orderly manner, represented as vital rather than subjugated as they were in the newspaper photographs. Their banners clearly captured in the photographs, displaying anti-discriminatory messages and unity.<sup>52</sup> Another interesting difference between the two types of imagery is in the framing, where the newspaper’s claustrophobic, zoomed in imagery evoked the idea of isolated criminal youth, other photographs of the protest are framed in a manner that allows for the viewer to take in the entire scope of it all. It allows for the viewer to understand the depth of the movement and the solidarity that exists in large numbers.

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49 Hazan, 58.

50 Hazan, 54.

51 Hazan, 62.

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52 Hazan, 65.



Figure 1: Police breaking up Black Panther protest, Al Hamishmar, Maariv, Yedioth Ahron, 19 May 1971.



Figure 2: Police in conflict with protestors, "Policemen drag one Al Hamishmar, Maariv, Yedioth Ahronoth, of the youngsters at yesterday's Panthers demonstration in 19 May 1971. Jerusalem," Maariv 19 May 1971.



Figure 3: Israeli troops during the Six-Days War, Bamachane (IDF Weekly) Memorial Issue, 12 June 1967.



Figure 4: Amateur photograph of the Black Panther Protest, Meir Wigoder, Black Panther Demonstration, Jerusalem, 1971.

## Conclusion

In the words of Paulo Freire, “sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity, become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.”<sup>53</sup> The Ashkenazi, having lived through a history marked by oppression, sought to regain their humanity after the horrific treatment they had endured in the Holocaust. In their attempt to rebuild and recontextualise their identity they were perhaps fearful of other identities interfering in this process and possibly fearful of an erasure of an identity that they sought to properly establish. There was little room for the nuances between the diasporas when creating the new Israeli Jewish identity, and as it was modelled after the idea of a metropolitan European identity, there was no room for an Arab Jewish identity to co-exist in the same space. It was especially difficult for the Mizrahi Jews to exist in this space between the government-promoted Jewish Self and the abhorred Muslim Other, as they shared many other cultural customs and values with the Other beyond religion. Despite the fact that the Israeli Jewish identity was not truly a reflection of either of the diasporas, at its core the Ashkenazi identity was never under scrutiny like the essence of the Mizrahi identity. For example, the Ashkenazi’s Yiddish had to make way in favour of Hebrew as well as the majority of Ashkenazi immigrants at that time hailing from Eastern Europe rather than the metropolitan images of Paris and Berlin that it was moulded after.<sup>54</sup> The abundant amount of overlap that existed between the cultures of the Mizrahi and the Arabs, perhaps most significantly the shared language, could never be

accepted in this context. Despite the fact that the colour line can easily be shifted in the public perception, as has become apparent by comparing the manner of representation of the Mizrahi between coverage of the Six-Days War and that of the Black Panther protests, it is not as simple to shift an internalised identity enforced through a lack of social mobility and active Othering. While in a practical sense the Black Panther movement was never able to fully bloom from a group of protestors campaigning for equality into a fully realised political party that could make a difference from within, the effects that they have had on Israeli politics and public awareness were undeniable. Despite inspiring social reforms and causing some change in the Israeli political landscape, it has however still done little to address the conflict in identity experienced by the Mizrahi. Even in recent years the Mizrahi identity still is somewhat of a taboo topic in Israel,<sup>55</sup> and with the relationship between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations remaining overwhelmingly hostile, there does not seem to be a definitive end to the Mizrahi identity crisis in sight. Perhaps the solution to the ‘Arab question’ could involve a closer examination of Israel’s and its people’s links to the communities around them.

<sup>53</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Massad, “Zionism’s Internal Others,” 55.



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# **Comanche Influence vs Spanish Borders:**

The Role of a 'Subaltern' Actor in the Age  
of the Nation-State

*By Juan Dominguez Garcia*

## Abstract

This essay reexamines international relations through the lens of the Comanche's rise to dominance in the Great Plains during the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century. By analysing the role of horse culture, raids, and trade, the study highlights how the Comanche crafted a powerful and borderless yet cohesive society that diverges from the traditional concept of the nation-state. Diplomatic interactions, particularly with Spain's New Mexico, further underscore their influence. This paper challenges traditional Euro-centric narratives, urging a more complete understanding of the making of global order that does not ignore the subaltern.

## Introduction

In 1744, Fray Miguel de Menchero wrote: 'A nation so bellicose and so brave that it dominates all those of the interior country, penetrating into more than a thousand leagues.'<sup>1</sup> He was not describing any major empire of the 'Old World', but a nation that is seldom present in maps of the colonial era, the Comanche. Far from aligning themselves with notions that are considered today to be key elements of what makes a nation, the Comanche did not have a clear border, a head of the state or government, or a unified army. Yet, as this essay will analyse, they dominated the Great Plains. The following research question will be answered: How did the Comanche influence colonial expansion in the American continent, and what factors characterised their rise in the mid-eighteenth? To do so, I will focus

<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Hackett, Adolph F. A. Bandelier, and Fanny Bandelier, *Historical documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya and approaches thereto, to 1773*, Papers of the Department of Historical research (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie institution of Washington, 1923), 401.

on analysing their relations with New Mexico (as a province of New Spain) and, briefly, the newly-independent Mexico.

Unlike Menchero, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson neglected the position of Indigenous peoples in *The Expansion of International Society*, which in itself caused these groups to also be absent from a significant portion of subsequent International Relations (IR) theory.<sup>2</sup> Thus, due to the knowledge gap created by this oversight, the role of subaltern actors in the making of global order is a topic worth revising. Taking into account the perspectives of Native Americans will allow us to expand our understanding of this order and paint a more complete picture.

This paper is divided into two sections. First, after this introduction, the historiography of Native Americans and their position in the making of global order according to IR scholarship will be analysed. The concept of 'Native Americans' itself can be considered quite generic and one that does not do justice to the depth and complexity of the multiple people, cultures, and languages that lay within it. Despite this, as this first section will show, IR scholarship has often used it to quickly (and often dismissively) address their position. Secondly, the case study will be presented. As highlighted by the research question two main topics will be explored. First, the development of three key elements that empowered a 'borderless' Comanche society (horse culture, raiding, and trade) will be discussed. These enabled their rapid expansion from one of the many tribes of the Southern Great Plains to

<sup>2</sup> Neta C. Crawford, "Native Americans and the Making of International Society," in *The Globalization of International Society*, ed. Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 102.

a powerful, influential, and 'dominating' nation, as described by Menchero. After this, Comanche diplomacy and their interaction with New Mexico and Mexico will be analysed, which will also allow us to understand the role of the Comanche in determining the nature of these relations. This paper, thus, aims to reconsider the role of subaltern actors in international relations by focusing on a case study that lacks one of the discipline's (presumed) key elements: the nation-state.

## Native Americans in the Making of a Global Order - Historiography

The role of Native Americans in shaping the global order, as examined by IR scholarship, has been generalised, vague, or simply inexistent for a long time.<sup>3</sup> However, in the last few decades, a certain shift can be observed. This section highlights the two main currents that can be observed in this field: the traditional and the revisionist. Considering the importance of Hedley Bull's work for IR historiography, I begin by analysing the English School's viewpoint on the role played by Native Americans. Secondly, breaking with the former school of thought, the more recent developments that have emerged (mostly) since the turn of the century are analysed, focusing on

<sup>3</sup> As the following paragraphs show, this paper discusses specifically the work of Bull (and, briefly, Hegel), but one can also look at, for example, Watson's *The Evolution of International Society* or Wight's *Systems of States*, which highlight precisely this generalisation. Admittedly, the latter does briefly discuss the role of certain tribes in maintaining the balance of power in North America, but only during the early years of colonisation and playing a minor part within the greater game of colonial dominance; Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester University Press, 1977), 196-199; Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (Routledge, 1992); Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 3rd edition (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001).

the works of Neta Crawford, Paul Keal, David Graeber, and David Wengrow.

In the 335 pages that make up *The Anarchical Society*, there are only a couple of loose references to Native Americans and Indigenous peoples. This is not surprising for a book which argues that European order was exported to the rest of the world once certain 'requirements' for membership were fulfilled. Despite this, there are several mentions of, for example, the African order. It is mostly presented as a stateless and savage society that eventually integrated into the European order.<sup>4</sup> Considering this view, the position of Native Americans in Bull's story would not be too far off. Thus, when such a relevant piece of literature neglected an entire continent until European domination arrived, it resulted in a lack of scholarship on the topic and a significant knowledge gap.<sup>5</sup> It is undeniable that such disregard weakens Bull's conclusions and his ability to convince the reader of his findings. However, it is also important to recognise that Bull is not the first one to neglect the position of Native Americans, he is rather in line with previous thinkers. For example, Georg Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* divides history into four eras: the Oriental World, the Greek World, the Roman World, and the German World, once again completely disregarding an entire continent.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he describes Native Americans as being of 'mild and passionless disposition' as well as being characterised by 'a crouching submissiveness towards a European', which shows 'the inferiority of these individuals in all respects'.<sup>7</sup> While these assertions are much more blunt than Bull's, one can certainly make a connection between the

<sup>4</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 20, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Crawford, "Native Americans and the Making of International Society," 102-104.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, 98, 99.

two views: the European order is superior, and there is little room for Native American influence in the building of global order. To conclude, there is a significant current in IR scholarship seen both through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that not only completely rejects the existence of any Native American impact in the international order, but also refuses to even address their case beyond a couple of vague and inaccurate phrases.

Despite this characterisation, it is also important to recognise the recent developments that have allowed for a much deeper understanding of the world thanks to a more thorough study of subaltern groups as well as through revising previous scholarship. An example of the latter can be found in *The Anarchical Society at 40: Contemporary Challenges and Prospects* edited by Hidemi Suganami, Madeline Carr, and Adam Humphreys. Published in 2017, this collaborative work contrasts Bull's ideas with more recent advances in IR scholarship and history in order to determine to what extent they still work today.<sup>8</sup> Paul Keal's chapter specifically deals with the issue of Native Americans and their lack of representation. One of the main conclusions he finds is the fact that after the publication of Bull's work, non-state actors have become much more prominent in IR and the making of global order, and issues such as Indigenous sovereignty have begun to be explored.<sup>9</sup> This also highlights the difficulty of the task at hand: fitting non-

Western interpretations of sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction into a Western model is problematic. This—among other reasons—causes Native interpretations to be absent in Bull's analysis.<sup>10</sup>

Neta C. Crawford's chapter in *The Globalization of International Society*, published in 2017, is another example of the recent developments seen in the topic of Native Americans and IR. Her work, like Keal's, emphasises the clash between Indigenous and Western understandings of key concepts such as sovereignty, but she also concludes that nowadays Native Americans are directly influencing the established order and international relations, either through protests, reoccupation of their ancestral lands, resistance, or other forms of political participation.<sup>11</sup> For example, the protests against the construction of the Keystone oil pipeline (which could affect the water supply of Sioux reservations) gathered between 35,000 and 50,000 people.<sup>12</sup> The protests eventually led to the cancellation of the project via executive order.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the LANDBACK movement has managed to repeatedly voice Native American grievances to the international community.<sup>14</sup> Most notably,

<sup>10</sup> Keal, "The Anarchical Society and Indigenous Peoples," 232.

<sup>11</sup> Crawford, "Native Americans and the Making of International Society," 120, 121.

<sup>12</sup> Suzanne Goldenberg, "Keystone XL Protesters Pressure Obama on Climate Change Promise," *The Guardian*, 17 February 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/feb/17/keystone-xl-pipeline-protest-dc>.

<sup>13</sup> "Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis," *The White House*, 21 January 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-public-health-and-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-climate-crisis>.

<sup>14</sup> Ashley Collman, "Native American Protesters Blocked the Road Leading up to Mount Rushmore and Faced off with the National Guard in the Hours before Trump's Fiery Speech," *Business Insider*, 4 July 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/native-americans-blocked-road-to-mount-rushmore-before-trump-speech-2020-7>.

<sup>8</sup> Hidemi Suganami, Madeline Carr, and Adam Humphreys, *The Anarchical Society at 40: Contemporary Challenges and Prospects*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3-5.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Keal, "The Anarchical Society and Indigenous Peoples," in *The Anarchical Society at 40: Contemporary Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Hidemi Suganami, Madeline Carr, and Adam Humphreys, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 232.



their 2020 protest scheduled hours before Trump was set to give a speech in Mount Rushmore ended with the intervention of the National Guard and garnered significant media attention.<sup>15</sup>

The recent work of David Graeber and David Wengrow shows another example of this revisionist trend. In *The Dawn of Everything*, the authors challenge many of the (western) assumptions about what civilization looks like, including the supposed linear progression from hunter-gatherers to “urban commercial civilizations”.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the making of global order, they also reconsider the role of Native Americans by analysing their influence in the debates before and during the Enlightenment. They focus specifically on Kandiaronk (Chief of the Wendat people) and how the ideas of freedom, (wealth) inequality, punishment, and liberty that his people held not only reached European intellectuals, but even influenced the salon debates that characterised the Enlightenment.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the contrast between the two currents is clear. It would be unthinkable for the English School to even consider Native Americans as relevant players that shaped international relations, whereas now we see more and more scholars that are willing to reevaluate this and put forward new arguments. As we have seen, Keal focuses on non-state actors and their role, Crawford decides to tackle the

15 “Doubling Down for LANDBACK: With Nick Tilsen After 2.5 Year Legal Battle Comes to an End,” *NDN Collective*, 21 December 2022, <https://ndncollective.org/doubling-down-for-landback-q-a-with-nick-tilsen-after-2-5-year-legal-battle-comes-to-an-end/>; Nikki A Pieratos, Sarah S Manning, and Nick Tilsen, “Land Back: A Meta Narrative to Help Indigenous People Show up as Movement Leaders,” *Leadership* 17, no. 1 (1 February 2021): 47–61; “LANDBACK Manifesto,” *LANDBACK*, accessed 11 May 2023, <https://landback.org/manifesto/>.

16 David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Penguin UK, 2021), 68.

17 Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 59.

issue of Indigenous vs Western definitions while also discussing the more recent forms of Native resistance and political pressure, while Graeber and Wengrow discuss a specific case to showcase the influence of Native Americans in key debates about freedom and order. Considering this literary background, the goal of this paper is to analyse the case of the Comanche during the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century, and shine light on a different way in which Native Americans influenced the making of global order, and even contemporary geopolitics.

## Building a Borderless Empire: Horses, Raids, and Trade

In order to analyse the position of the Comanche in brokering relations with their nation-state neighbours, it is first important to understand the sources of their power. Throughout the eighteenth century, we can observe the development of three key elements that facilitated their superiority in the Great Plains: horse culture, raids, and trade.

The origin of horse culture in Great Plains can be identified in one specific event, the Pueblo revolt. In 1680, the Pueblo people revolted against the Spanish and expelled them from the colonial province of New Mexico. Most importantly, it is estimated that they obtained around one thousand horses, which they promptly traded and bred, introducing them for the first time to the many surrounding tribes.<sup>18</sup> Among these tribes were the Comanche (who at the time were part of a greater tribe, the Shoshone, located in the Rocky Mountains). The reason behind their split from the Shoshone is still debated, for

18 Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the land: Indians and empires in the early American West* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.

example, Ned Blackhawk's *Violence over the land* suggests that the Comanche migrated towards the south and away from the mountains in search of more horses and a more suitable lifestyle, while other works such as Pekka Hämäläinen's *The Comanche Empire* argue that the relocation was also prompted by pressure from other tribes and a growing interest in the slave market within the frontier settlements of New Spain.<sup>19</sup> In any case, the Comanche moved away from the mountains and into the plains, creating the perfect recipe to develop a strong horse culture, one that would allow them to thrive in their new homeland.<sup>20</sup> As the following paragraphs will show, horses were the element that held together a significant part of Comanche society, from raids, to hunting and trade.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, as equestrian life became the norm, the Comanche started raiding neighbouring tribes and European settlements. The success behind these raids can be attributed to three key factors. Firstly, partly as a result of bison hunting, the Comanche had perfected their ability to use bow and arrow on horseback.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the raids targeted mostly unfortified settlements.<sup>22</sup> Thirdly, the terrain was extremely well known by the Comanche, and this allowed them to perform surprise and unpredictable attacks.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, these raids served two purposes: obtain goods to use

19 Blackhawk, *Violence over the land*, 35, 36; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 23-28.

20 Frances Levine, "Economic Perspectives on the Comanchero Trade," in *Farmers, Hunters, and Colonists Interaction Between the Southwest and the Southern Plains*, ed. Katherine A. Spielmann (University of Arizona Press, 1991), 157.

21 Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 38, 61.

22 Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1998): 494.

23 Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 40, 186.

and trade (slaves, tobacco, horses); and assert authority.<sup>24</sup> Territorial jurisdiction as understood by the European powers of the time was certainly not the way of establishing the fictitious borders of the Comancheria, but rather it was through these raids that they either created tributary relations (in exchange for putting an end to the raids), or simply forced the tribes to move away from the territory. The former will be discussed later within the context of the Mexican War of Independence, but an example of the latter can be found in the Apache, who were forced to move into Mexico due to the pressure exerted by Comanche raids, and eventually resorted to pledging allegiance to Spain in exchange for protection.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the manifestation of this supposed territorial jurisdiction is not characterised by clear boundaries, but by spheres of strong influence.

The third and final element builds on the other two. The horse culture allowed for efficient raids, which in turn led to the expansion of the Comancheria's influence, and due to their increasing power and control, goods inevitably began to flow into and out of their territory. The Comanche were mostly self-sufficient, as bison were plentiful at the time and they provided goods such as meat, leather, and sinew, however, trade with the 'outside' was mostly bolstered by slaves, horses (both often obtained through raids) and bison robes.<sup>26</sup> This not only created a dynamic trading relationship between the Comanche and their tributaries, but also led to trade with other European powers. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the French and the Comanche

24 Hämäläinen, 5.

25 Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540-1795* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 243-245.

26 Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center," 489.

already had a solid and straightforward trading relationship: French firearms in exchange for slaves and robes.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the Comanche were also selling the horses and slaves obtained through raids back to Spanish frontier settlements, as well as hides and meat, all of which were desperately needed by the small communities that lay in the periphery of the Spanish Empire.<sup>28</sup>

To conclude, the rise of the Comanche throughout the eighteenth century can be directly attributed to three elements and their complementarity. The horse culture first enabled the raids, which then opened the door for trade to thrive within their area of influence, this trade then allowed for guns and other crucial goods to further empower the Comanche. If one were to take any of these three elements out of the equation, the result would be a considerably weaker Comancheria that would not have the upper hand over its neighbours, which again highlights the importance of this complementarity. As we will see in the following section, this upper hand then manifested itself in different shapes and forms, with the one constant being the superiority of the Comanche.

## Comanche Diplomacy: New Mexico and Mexico

The three elements outlined above already hint at the influence of the Comanche in the eighteenth century. We will now dive deeper into the nature of Comanche diplomacy and the nature of the relations forged with the

surrounding settlements. This section focuses on analysing the diplomatic and military interactions with Spanish New Mexico. Before reaching the conclusion, a brief evaluation of the establishment of tributary relations with Mexico during the early nineteenth century will also be made.

In 1750, as the Comanche became the dominant native power of the Great Plains and the Comancheria's influence expanded, they soon came into contact with the New Mexican market. Despite their interest in trade, the goods offered in the settlements were limited in terms of quantity which, together with the introduction of Spanish sanctions against trade with the Comanche, led them to adopt a *raiding-and-trading* strategy, with the latter occurring clandestinely as well as with the help of French traders and other Comanche allies.<sup>29</sup> Only one year after this, New Mexican Governor Cachupin met with several Comanche chiefs for the first time to put an end to the hostilities. The 'peace' deal would revoke the sanctions against the natives and allow them to freely trade in colonial settlements, but most importantly, it recognised the Comanche as a sovereign nation and established clear guidelines on communication between New Mexican and Comanche authorities. In other words, in the eyes of Spanish diplomacy, the borderless Comancheria was now 'elevated' to, virtually, a nation-state. The only condition imposed on the Comanche was to cease the raids.<sup>30</sup> Despite this relatively simple arrangement the raids did not actually cease, and it is here that we can observe, once again, the superiority of the Comanche system. While the most respected chiefs maintained the position that peace should prevail, the smaller bands continued engaging in small attacks

<sup>27</sup> John G. Douglass and William M. Graves, *New Mexico and the Pimeria Alta: the colonial period in the American Southwest* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017), 170.

<sup>28</sup> Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center," 497.

<sup>29</sup> Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 42, 43.

<sup>30</sup> Hämäläinen, 47.

and skirmishes.<sup>31</sup> Spanish diplomats might consider the Comanche an organised nation-state with a clear hierarchy, but that does not mean that they behaved as such. Enabled by their more 'abstract' form of government and the inexistence of clear boundaries, the major Comanche chiefs had a sort of 'plausible deniability' that allowed them to maintain both the flow of stolen goods and slaves into the Comancheria and the benefits of (openly and lawfully) trading with New Mexico.

Barely three years later, in 1754 the newly arrived New Mexican Governor Del Valle scrapped his predecessor's policy and, in an attempt to curb the Natives' power, prohibited the sale of firearms and imposed tariffs on goods sold to them.<sup>32</sup> The response by the Comanche was, once again, a return to raids and clandestine trade. The conflict that ensued was greater than the previous one, bringing it closer to a war than to small-scale skirmishes. It also lasted significantly longer, until the return of Governor Cachuþín in 1762. Considering the scale of the conflict and the inability of New Mexican settlements to grow under those conditions, he saw no alternative but to broker a peace deal.<sup>33</sup> Under this second treaty, the sanctions and tariffs were removed. Furthermore, a New Mexican-Comanche 'alliance' was declared, which, effectively, was a stronger commitment to end hostilities. This commitment also meant the end of the alliance between the Ute tribe (rivals of the Comanche) and the Spanish, which in itself created a new expansion route for the Comanche.<sup>34</sup> In

1762, conflicts between the Comanche and New Mexico ceased, leading their shared border to become a place for trading and cultural exchange, as the Comanche continued to strengthen their territory and expand through the subjugation of bands of other Native tribes living in the areas surrounding the sphere of influence of the Comancheria (such as the Kiowa, Wichita, Ute, or Apache).<sup>35</sup> With the alliance in place, hostilities against New Mexico ceased, but the Comanche turned to Texas (populated both by the Apache and a few Spanish settlements) to continue their expansion.<sup>36</sup> The Texas campaign and its consequences require an entire research dedicated to it, but it shows once again the versatility with characterised the Comanche system, who were able to capitalise on their strengths and set the rules of the Southern Great Plains while consistently expanding their influence.

Regarding tributary relations, apart from those established with other Native Americans (which cannot be said to affect 'global order' to a large extent) the Comanche also took advantage of the chaos caused by the crumbling authority of the Spanish Empire in Mexico. The first instance of a tributary relationship can be found in the early nineteenth century when Mexican local officials began to 'drift away' from the authority of the Spanish Empire. The Comanche recognised how this move weakened the Mexicans and their ability to respond to potential Comanche attacks, so they demanded gifts and yearly tributes to avoid conflict.<sup>37</sup> This would remain the norm until Mexico

31 Hämäläinen, 44.

32 Hämäläinen, "The Western Comanche Trade Center," 490.

33 Gerald Betty, *Comanche Society: Before the reservation* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2002), 154.

34 Betty, *Comanche Society*, 154; Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 53.

35 F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 17-20.

36 John L. Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest: A Narrative History of Colonial New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 245-50.

37 Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 221, 222.

achieved full independence in 1821, and as the newly formed state was simply not able to pay said tributes, they instead provided the Comanche with major trading privileges, invited delegations to Mexico City, and avoided conflict at all costs.<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, and as we have seen on repeated occasions, this did not stop the Comanche from maximising their gains. Bands would often ride into Mexican settlements to either raid or occupy them for several days with little regard for authority.<sup>39</sup>

This section has put forward two arguments. Firstly, Comanche superiority was the norm in the Southern Great Plains. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century and exemplified by their relation with New Mexico, the Comanche managed to benefit from raid and trade at the same time, eventually forming an alliance with the New Mexican governor on their terms. Finding themselves in a similar position, the Comanche once again showcased their superiority by receiving tributes and trading privileges from the chaotic and newly established nation of Mexico while they continued to raid and occupy settlements largely unfettered. Secondly, this section has also argued that it was precisely the system of government of the Comanche (powered by the three elements discussed previously) that allowed them to further benefit from these relations with New Mexico and Mexico. Not playing by the rules of the archetypical 'nation-state' enabled them to partly deflect the responsibility of certain raids that would have otherwise put an end to their privileged position, allowing them to profit doubly.

## Conclusion

The Comanche were much more than just one of the many tribes in the borderlands of European colonies. This paper has analysed their rise, identifying three key elements that enabled their success. Through the establishment of horse culture, raids became an efficient source of wealth and power, which itself opened trade opportunities both within and outside the Comancheria's area of influence. Furthermore, the complementarity of these three elements was key in maintaining (and increasing) their power. Their relations with New Mexico highlight precisely their role in the expansion of European colonies in North America. The analysis of these relations is characterised by a significant superiority of the Comanche that materialised in raids, trading privileges, and eventually an alliance on their terms. This superiority has also been recognised in the case of Mexico's relations with them, which were once again marked by raids, privileges, and tributes. This paper has also shown how, in both of these cases, the Comanche's system of government enabled them to continue raiding their neighbours while maintaining benefits such as trading privileges or gifts.

The story told by the English school and by 'traditional' IR theory is a very different one from the one discussed in this paper. The English School not only fails to grasp the importance of subaltern actors such as Native Americans, but also fails to consider their case at all. Writing about centuries of history and order formation is not an easy task, there are countless important events and interactions between civilisations that directly affect the order that we have today, but this is not an excuse to neglect relevant topics, as it will simply lead to incomplete conclusions. Native Americans,

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 120-23.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 124.

as well as many other subaltern actors, are grossly misrepresented in traditional IR theory. However, it is also relevant to mention that, through the efforts of scholars such as Paul Keal, Neta Crawford or David Graeber, a revision of this topic is underway, and although Native American historiography is not the most popular of topics, it has received much more attention in the last twenty years than in the century before that.

studies where the subject does not fit traditional interpretations of the nation-state would also enable us to get a better grasp of systems that do not fit the models we have created and relied on in the past, thus helping us make this discipline a more nuanced and multifaceted one.

This paper contributes to the scholarly debate by taking a concrete case study—the Comanche in the mid-eighteenth century—and analysing its implications from a revisionist perspective. An opportunity for future research can already be recognised here, the period of Comanche superiority is not only reflected in their struggles with New Mexico and Mexico. Their relations with surrounding tribes, Texas, or even the United States are all topics worth reconsidering from this new perspective (and something this paper does not evaluate, as it simply steps out of our scope). Pekka Hämäläinen's *The Comanche Empire* (referenced often throughout this paper) is particularly useful in laying the framework for this, as it studies hundreds of years of Comanche history, but there is still room for more in-depth research to develop. At a broader level, this paper also opens the possibility for researchers studying the role of other subaltern actors and their conflicts to compare their cases with the Comanche. For example, we see certain parallels in the findings of this paper with the guerrilla tactics that have marked countless clashes throughout world history, comparing case studies would allow us to better understand where the power of these subaltern actors lay. Finally, using this research in comparison with other case



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# **Bending the ‘Truth’:**

The Unexpected Power of Propaganda

*By Isabelle de Jong*

## Abstract

The Russo-Ukrainian War broke out in February 2022 when Russia invaded eastern parts of the Ukrainian Landmass. Around the world, politicians and citizens alike were shocked by this historic event, as many were able to remember the tension during the Cold War. The United States has long played a pivotal role on the geopolitical stage. During the Cold War, the United States recognized Ukraine's importance in pushing its dogma. A bond was established between the two countries during this period and was rekindled when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. This article determines how the United States aimed to nurture its friendship with Ukraine through propagation of anti-Soviet rhetoric in an American investigation into what transpired during the Ukrainian Famine. This Famine is one of the greatest tragedies in Ukrainian history and was therefore politically interesting for the United States to utilise. This research will also shine light on the nature of the United States' and Ukraine's relationship, exemplifying the relevance of this relatively unknown famine for the Cold War and the current Russo-Ukrainian War.

## Introduction

In 1919, a few years after the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917, Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union as a satellite state. As a Soviet State, one of the many sufferings it had to bear was the Ukrainian Famine of 1932, commonly known as the 'Holodomor'.

Soviet propaganda and censorship hid the Famine from the rest of the world, silencing the Ukrainian victims for

decades. It was only in the 1980s when the Ukrainian Famine became a topic of discussion. This was the result of the introduction of the political concept 'glasnost' (openness) by Mikhail Gorbachev towards the end of the Cold War. Glasnost brought more transparency to Soviet politics; it can even be suggested that it caused some of the first cracks in the power the Soviet Union had over its subjects. The free flow of information, the primary idea behind glasnost, disrupts totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union.

The newly gained openness in the spread of information resulted in the long-delayed acknowledgment of the Ukrainian Famine. Subsequently, narratives could be shaped around the historic event for the first time. The newly emerging information also gave way for international courts to legally investigate the causes and effects of the Ukrainian Famine to fully comprehend what had transpired.

This article aims to understand how the narrative around the Ukrainian Famine could have been utilised for political purposes and how it is still being politicised by answering the research question: 'how has geopolitical 'truth-telling' of the United States influenced the western narrative around the Ukrainian Famine over time?' In the context of the current Russo-Ukrainian War, the world media has drawn comparisons between this war and the Ukrainian Famine and has emphasised the strong ties between the United States and Ukraine, making it historically relevant to conduct this research.

## Contextualization

What is generally known about the Famine is that between 1932 and 1934 'Kulaks,' rich peasants, were forced to give up their possessions and become part of collective farms.<sup>1</sup> Becoming part of a collective farm implied that people lost their ability to provide for themselves. People lost their possessions and ability to grow food, and everything became state-owned, making 'Kulaks' completely dependent on the state for food. In the background of this collectivisation, two problems occurred: crop failure and high export quotas placed on the 'Kulaks'. This left insufficient volumes of food for the Ukrainian peasants. Furthermore, a law was passed in 1932 that prohibited Ukrainians from leaving the country in search of food.<sup>2</sup> When hunger reached its peak in Ukraine, organised teams raided homes in search of the last scraps of food, completely depriving people of resources.<sup>3</sup>

The seizure of all resources is what gave the famine its name 'Holodomor', meaning 'extermination by hunger.'<sup>4</sup> The word 'extermination' implies intention in killing, and 'intention' requires knowledge about a certain event. Usage of the name 'Holodomor' therefore indicates that the Famine is automatically regarded as genocide, making it heavily politicised. Therefore, this essay refers to this historic event as 'Ukrainian Famine' instead of 'Holodomor' to maintain political neutrality. Scholars have investigated whether Stalin knew about the 'Holodomor' or not, and if so, what his intentions could have been. Depending on background

and conviction, opinions may vary. Ukrainian scholar Mykola Soroka suggest that Stalin knew about the famine because of Russian émigrés. Émigrés are people that had fled the Soviet Union in fear of prosecution after the Revolution, but were, regardless well-informed about the Ukrainian Famine through underground channels.<sup>5</sup> They wrote about their findings and spread it through newspapers. Whilst they feared Stalin, they nevertheless supported Ukrainian Russification. This attitude towards Ukrainians and their wide spread of publications over the world makes it plausible that Stalin read about the Famine in their newspaper.<sup>6</sup> American historian J. Arch Getty, is more impartial to Stalin's possible knowledge about the famine.<sup>7</sup> He regards the 'Holodomor' as a result of an accumulation of fatal events, and neglecting the lowering of grain quota in Ukraine when there were claims of a famine.<sup>8</sup>

Russian historian Alexander Etkind, is less nuanced and denies Stalin's ignorance. According to him, starvation of the 'Kulaks' was part of a deliberate policy to exterminate them as they stood in the way of his five years plan.<sup>9</sup> The five-year plan was a means to modernise the Soviet economy which implied collectivization. However, 'Kulaks' would not voluntarily concede to collectivisation, thus eliminating them was a way to solve this problem. Stanford based historian Norman Naimark goes further by putting the 'Holodomor' can additionally be considered in the

5 Mykola I. Soroka, "The Ukrainian Famine of 1932-22 in the Russian Émigré Discourse of the Interwar Period," *Ukraina Moderna* 30 (May 2014): 276-280.

6 Soroka, "The Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33," 301.

7 Soroka, 301.

8 J. Arch Getty, "New sources and old narratives, Roundtable on Soviet Famines," *Contemporary European History* 27, no. 3 (2018): 450-451.

9 Françoise Thom, "Reflections on Stalin and the Holodomor," *East/ West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 11, no. 1 (2015): 84-85.

1 Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (Penguin Books Ltd., 2018), xxiv.

2 Applebaum, *Red Famine*, xxiv.

3 Applebaum, xxiv.

4 Applebaum, xxiv.



context of other Soviet famines. In the 1930s, many famines occurred in the Soviet Union; they were part of the 'Communist genocides'.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Naimark does regard the Famine as part of a string of famines brought on deliberately to eliminate political enemies.

The extent of Stalin's knowledge about the Famine is important to establish whether there was intent involved. The International Criminal Court grants that a genocidal status can only be attributed to a crime when there was 'intent to destroy' particular populations of people.<sup>11</sup> The concept genocide was coined in 1946 by Raphael Lemkin and refers to a 'phenomenon of the destruction of whole populations based on religion, ethnicity or nationality'.<sup>12</sup> However, labelling famines as a genocide is difficult. Rebekah Moore addresses this difficulty in the context of the 'Holodomor':

*"The question of intent has become an important point of contention. If Stalin consciously inflicted the famine on Ukrainians, it can be more easily classified as a genocide. If he did not intend it, however, but did not act to stop it once started, or it was caused by largely natural factors (and thus wholly unintended), the case for genocide becomes much weaker, and the already murky issues of blame and responsibility are further clouded."*<sup>13</sup>

10 Norman M. Naimark, "How the Holodomor Can Be Integrated into our Understanding of Genocide," *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 11, no. 1 (2015): 123.

11 "How the Court works," International Criminal Court, accessed December 1, 2022, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/about/how-the-court-works>.

12 Raphael Lemkin, "Genocide," *The American Scholar* 15, no. 2. (Spring 1946): 227.

13 Rebekah Moore, "A Crime Against Humanity Arguably Without Parallel in European History": Genocide and the 'Politics' of Victimhood in Western Narratives of the Ukrainian Holodomor," *Special War and Peace, Barbarism and Civilization in Modern Europe and its Empires* 58, no. 3 (September 2012): 374.

Famines are often the accumulation of several natural and political causes; the Ukrainian Famine is no exception. To understand and 'identify political intent and responsibility' of famines, David Marcus created a taxonomy of 'faminogenic acts'.<sup>14</sup> Marcus categorised four degrees of famine. A first-degree famine crime occurs when there is determination to 'exterminate a population through famine'.<sup>15</sup> A second-degree famine crime is the result of recklessness.<sup>16</sup> It occurs when authorities are 'recklessly ignoring evidence that his or her policies are creating'.<sup>17</sup> The third-degree occurs when there is indifference amongst the authorities; they are aware of the famine but do not 'alleviate hunger'.<sup>18</sup> 'The fourth category is the lack of political culpability', meaning that authorities are unable to respond effectively.<sup>19</sup> Alex de Waal recognizes the 'Holodomor' as a first-degree famine crime as Kulaks were exterminated purposely in an attempt to modernise the Soviet Union. Famines can be considered as a political tool, as the occurrence of genocides is often the result of totalitarianism because economic and medical technology could remove the 'threat of major famines'.<sup>20</sup> The twentieth century was therefore paradoxical: famines were disappearing from the globe and yet, great famines persisted and kept occurring during the Great Chinese Famine 1959-1961.<sup>21</sup>

The legacy of famines is not widely investigated. Famines are often remembered as rather static, as if historical processes and geographical context are not

14 Alex de Waal, *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 106.

15 De Waal, *Mass Starvation*, 106.

16 De Waal, 107.

17 De Waal, 107.

18 De Waal, 107.

19 De Waal, 108.

20 Ó Gráda, "Making Famine History," 5.

21 Ó Gráda, 5.

taken into account.<sup>22</sup> Attributively, famine heritage is often politicised, especially in Eastern Europe.<sup>23</sup> Mark-Fitzgerald regards the memory of famines as multidirectional as it is 'often placed in dialogue with commemorations of other events.'<sup>24</sup> This implies that famine memorials have never been able to attract undivided attention.

Through famines, governments can have control over the human body; this type of control is what Michel Foucault coined 'biopower.' Biopower is governmental power 'exercised at the level of life,' as it directly affects citizens' bodies.<sup>25</sup> When utilised correctly, biopower could optimise citizens' life.<sup>26</sup> The danger here lies in the possibility that biopower can be used for the wrong purposes, such as the extermination of certain groups of people within society as seen during the Second World War. If the 'Holodomor' was purposely executed, then it can be suggested that this was an example where biopower was used for the wrong reasons.

Biopower, knowledge and truth are deeply interconnected, as biopower implies that the 'mechanism of power and knowledge have assumed responsibility for the life process.'<sup>27</sup> In this mechanism, the government holds the knowledge and imposes rules to improve citizens lives. The knowledge governments have is never pure nor neutral according to Thomas Lemke, as it only 'represents' the governed reality.<sup>28</sup>

22 Marguerite Corporaal and Ingrid de Zwart, "Heritages of hunger: European Famine legacies in current academic debates," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 28, no. 1 (2022): 32.

23 Corporaal, "Heritages of hunger," 32-33.

24 Corporaal, 34.

25 Johanna Oksala, "From Biopower to Governmentality," in *A Companion to Foucault*, ed. Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, Jana Sawicki (Black Publishing Ltd., 2013), 20-323.

26 Oksala, "From Biopower to Governmentality," 321.

27 Oksala, 321.

28 Oksala, 326.

To push a reality or agenda, certain populations within society are sometimes sacrificed for the 'greater good' as is what happened to Jews in Nazi Germany.<sup>29</sup>

Arguably, 'truth' is the first thing at stake in political conflicts. Often in such contexts, what can be regarded as 'truth' is altered or changed. Truth about the Ukrainian Famine was lost due to 'Socialist realism,' which is a combination of 'realism,' 'socialist commitment' and 'party-spirit.'<sup>30</sup> Under Stalin's tenure, the gap widened between what people were made to believe and what really happened.<sup>31</sup> The result of 'Socialist realism' was that inconveniences to the regime were denied. Slums were 'abolished,' and the Ukrainian Famine and other Soviet famines were covered up.<sup>32</sup> This censorship caused people to be 'silenced, shot or incarcerated in concentration camps.'<sup>33</sup> The cover up of information about the Ukrainian Famine is 'subjugated knowledge.'<sup>34</sup> This is the historical knowledge which was 'present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and criticism.'<sup>35</sup> Any prospect of the 'truth' was being taken from citizens.

Altering the 'truth' to suit the purpose of a government, can be referred to as 'truth-telling.' 'Truth-telling' does not imply expressing the 'truth' but expressing thoughts, ideas, etc. as one can only approach the truth. It is impossible to practise it as truth depends

29 Ladelle McWhorter, "Racism and Biopower," *Philosophy Faculty Publications* (2010): 77.

30 Alec Nove, *Glasnost in Action: Cultural Renaissance in Russia* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: 1989), 1.

31 Nove, *Glasnost in Action*, 2.

32 Nove, 2.

33 Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, propaganda and dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

34 Michel Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 82.

35 Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge*, 82.

on the beholder. A condition for 'truth-telling,' or parrhesia, is a democratic constitution, which requires free speech to be successful.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union was not a democratic state and was therefore subjected to 'bad parrhesia' which means having a 'consensual opinion.'<sup>37</sup> In practice, this turns out to be manipulative and untruthful.<sup>38</sup> A broad concern with parrhesia or bad parrhesia is that when governments practise either of them, it can often be interpreted by the public as the objective truth whereas it presents the government's point of view.

## Primary Source Criticism

### 3.1 Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933

The *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933* (1986) provides insights into the American perspective on the Ukrainian Famine. It is an American governmental document and therefore freely accessible online.

First and foremost, it is important to establish what an investigation is to comprehend its aims. An investigation is the 'process of asserting the facts and collecting evidence in a particular matter'.<sup>39</sup> It is merely to collect evidence; no party will be convicted. Therefore, it does not have the purpose of convincing a party or a judge. Nonetheless, the information gathered through an investigation can be utilised for trials. There is an interesting context in which this investigation

came to be, namely, the Cold War (1945-1989) which predominantly influenced geopolitics at the time. Therefore, this investigation has an anti-Soviet bias due to the geopolitical atmosphere of the time. The evidence used, the way of conducting and the outcome of this investigation could be regarded as 'partial' history; there is a selective emphasis on certain aspects.

There were two reasons for conducting this investigation: 'to expand the world's knowledge of the famine' and to 'provide the American public with a better understanding of the Soviet system by revealing the Soviet role in the Ukraine famine'.<sup>40</sup> Conducting an investigation as such has (geo) political implications and bears great importance for victims of the famine.

The United States had its own agenda for conducting the investigation, but it was not the only country the investigation had an effect on. The investigation had significant meaning for the survivors of the Ukrainian Famine. They were heard and their trauma was acknowledged for the first time since the historic event had occurred. The testimonies themselves were selected at random. As many as possible were collected as there was a 53-year delay between the occurrence of the famine and when the testimonies were drawn up. Therefore, many people had deceased due to the famine itself, its aftereffects, the Second World War, diseases, old age or other causes. This resulted in a low number of first-hand

36 Thesesa Sauter and Gavin Kendall, "Parrhesia and Democracy: Truth-telling, Wikileaks and the Arab Spring," *Social alternatives* 30. No. 3, (2011): 11.

37 Sauter, "Parrhesia and Democracy", 11.

38 Sauter, 11.

39 Pooja Nayak, "Define and distinguish between investigation and inquiry," accessed April 4, 2023, <https://portal.theedulaw.com/SingleArticle?title=define-and-distinguish-between-investigation-and-inquiry>.

40 United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), // [catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488](http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488). Vi.

witnesses of the famine that were able to testify. Another reason why there were such a small number of people testifying was that some people declined to do so in fear for the well-being of their relatives who were still living in the Soviet Union at the time. These testimonies are generally representative for what occurred during the famine as they correspond to other testimonies that were drawn up at the time.

### 3.2 International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-1933 Famine in Ukraine

The previously analysed document will be compared to the *International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-1933 Famine in Ukraine* (1990). This inquiry into the famine was finalised in 1990, just before Ukrainian independence in 1991. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine the truth or falsify certain facts related to the offence known as the 'Holodomor'.<sup>41</sup> The inquiry was conducted several years after the American investigation, however, does not mention the existence of the aforementioned investigation. No evidence from the 1986 investigation was considered for this inquiry. The reason for this was impartiality, which is important considering that an inquiry lawfully weighs more than an investigation. An inquiry often occurs before the trial and after the investigation stage. It ascertains the nature of the crime and is therefore a formal document and politically heavier.<sup>42</sup>

This inquiry was initiated by the World Congress of Free Ukrainians, which is a non-governmental organisation functioning as a global voice for members

of the Ukrainian diaspora since 1967.<sup>43</sup> This group hoped to gain acknowledgment for the atrocities committed during the famine. It is explicitly stated in the introduction of the inquiry that, unlike the *American Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933*, it was executed with an independent, non-governmental, self-generated Commission.<sup>44</sup> Committee members originated from several countries to steer away from any possible political influence; they came from Sweden, Belgium, the United States, Argentina, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Other incentives for the inquiry were to investigate the following: the existence and extent of the famine; the cause or causes of such famine; the effect it had on Ukraine and its people; and the recommendations as to who should bear responsibility for the famine.<sup>45</sup>

There were no testimonies included in this inquiry as they had already been processed.

### 3.3 The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II

The source that provides the framework for the analysis on how the narrative around the Ukrainian Famine could have been shaped can be found in *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II* (1984). In this book, Michel Foucault introduces the concept of parrhesia. This concept is used to display how truth can be shaped by people or governments.

Foucault embedded his theory of parrhesia in 'ancient morality and in Greek

41 Pooja Nayak, "Define and distinguish between investigation and inquiry," accessed April 4, 2023, <https://portal.theedulaw.com/SingleArticle?title=define-and-distinguish-between-investigation-and-inquiry>.

42 Nayak, "Define and distinguish."

43 "ABOUT THE UWC," Ukrainian World Congress, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/about-the-uwc/>.

44 International Commission; International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine; 1990; accessed April 2022, 1.

45 International Commission; 1-5.

and Roman culture.<sup>46</sup> Greco-Roman philosophy makes Foucault's theory rather challenging to read with little to no prior knowledge about ancient philosophy. Another complication whilst reading Foucault's work is that his writing style is rather difficult to comprehend. This results in having to rely on secondary sources to be able to understand what Foucault refers to when addressing parrhesia. The interpretation of parrhesia relies therefore partially on other people's interpretation of the concept instead of the interpretation of this writer and Foucault's. The problem that arises is that Foucault could be wrongly interpreted, potentially making the theory unapplicable in the context of this paper.

## Methodology

The answer to the research question will be a qualitative and textual analysis. The central source in this thesis is the *American Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933* (1986).

The process of shaping a narrative will not be found in the testimonies of this investigation, as they will re-establish knowledge that is already available about the famine. What will be interesting for this research are the seemingly peripheral matters, the parts in which description has been given about the proceedings of the investigation. Most discourse analysis will come from the memoranda that can be found in the sections that are called 'Organisational Meeting.'<sup>47</sup>

46 Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: the Government of Self and Others II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 4.

47 United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986.*, viii, 172 p. (Washington:

Whilst conducting the discourse analysis, the presence of the words 'Holodomor' and 'famine' will be analysed as their presence will provide information about America's stance in the investigation. The name 'Holodomor,' due to its definition, bears great political weight as does calling the Ukrainian Famine a genocide or not, as aforementioned.

The *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933* (1986) will be compared to the *International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-1933 Famine in Ukraine* (1990). Comparison between these sources will show American political partiality and agenda and how its stance diverges or aligns with the international consensus.

## Findings

### 5.1 'Truth-telling' in the United States

Foucault was investigating truth and the nature of knowledge. He explained the concept 'parrhesia' which corresponds to 'truth-telling.'<sup>48</sup> The object of Foucault's analysis was an individual who is recognized as a speaker of 'truth.'<sup>49</sup> However, this does not imply that he is, in fact, telling the objective truth. The individual is merely expressing what he recognizes as 'truth.' Therefore, the message he conveys is believed as such.

United States' citizens were not subjected to biopower in the context of anti-Soviet propaganda. However, sufferers of the Famine were. Ukrainians suffered from the link between 'truth-telling' and biopower as both concepts evolved around exercising power over individuals. Therefore, Ukrainians were both mentally

U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987, //catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, iii, iv.

48 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 2.

49 Foucault, 2.

and physically influenced by the Soviet government. Truth is essential and the practice of 'truth-telling' could in theory release an individual from their subjugation to governmental biopower, as it is considered an 'ethical (non-political) practice of freedom, mental freedom from the doctrine of the government.'<sup>50</sup>

Practising freedom requires a democratically run government. Democracy grants citizens the freedom of speech and thereby the freedom for citizens to think for themselves. On the other hand, democracy requires free speech; therefore, they reinforce each other.<sup>51</sup> Foucault failed to write about the situation in which the government's 'truth' is disputed or dismissed, thus, 'disputed politicality.'<sup>52</sup>

Foucault looked at biopower from the individual perspective; this does not answer the question how governmental 'truth-telling' creates a power-relation between that government and its citizens in a democratic system. That same 'truth-telling' from the governmental perspective creates exactly that power-relation mentioned. 'Truth-telling' practised by governments has a different connotation than that same 'truth-telling' might have in the hands of the individual citizen. It is a minority- majority structure which creates a 'hierarchy of truth.'<sup>53</sup> This hierarchy entails that some are regarded to be more truthful than others; when there is a dispute about 'what 'truth' should prevail; power has its place'.<sup>54</sup>

50 Lida Maxwell, "The politics of and gender of truth-telling in Foucault's lectures on parrhesia," *Contemporary Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (January 2011): 23.

51 Sauter, "Parrhesia and Democracy," 11.

52 Maxwell, "The politics of and gender of truth-telling," 23.

53 Maxwell, 23.

54 Howard Goldstein, "The "Search for Subjugated Knowledge" Reconsidered," *Social Work* 38, no. 5 (Sept 1993): 643. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23717166>

Therefore the power that prevails creates a hierarchy in reliability and trustworthiness, even in a democratic system. Reliability of a democratic government also often stems from the fact that its members are elected and appointed by the majority vote from the citizens, leaving aside people with alternative worldviews.<sup>55</sup>

Whilst Foucault did not establish a direct connection between propaganda and 'truth-telling', this thesis, however, does. Propaganda is utilised to manipulate and or influence certain groups of people.<sup>56</sup> Ideas are often shaped by the government and have the aim to be accepted by the citizens.<sup>57</sup> People are being persuaded instead of being indoctrinated as is what happens when people are subjugated to censorship. Propaganda is not brainwashing; it is the utilisation of shared cultural beliefs and the managements of people's attitude and behaviour through 'symbols' of that group.<sup>58</sup>

The freedom of speech allows people to contest the message that a government aims to convey as a counterbalancing act. Applying 'truth-telling' to the United States can be translated to the propaganda utilised to manage citizens' attitudes towards the Soviet Union. An historic example is the Truman Doctrine (1947) which was an anti-Communist foreign policy launched by the United States to foster democracy in the world.

## 5.2 The political background of the relationship between the United States, Ukraine, and the Soviet Union

55 Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 3.

56 Karen S. Johnson-Cartee and Gary A. Copeland, *Strategic Political communication: rethinking social influence, persuasion, and propaganda* (Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004), 3-4.

57 Johnson-Cartee, *Strategic Political communication*, 1-4.

58 Johnson-Cartee, 1-4.

The *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933* (1986) has shown that the United States' Government aimed to establish a bad reputation for the Soviet Union.

The occurrence of the Ukrainian Famine and the cover-up of the events linked to that famine were perfect fuel for America's propaganda apparatus, or, American 'truth-telling.' An additional benefit was that this investigation helped to strengthen ties between the United States and Ukraine.

The value of Ukraine for both the United States and the Soviet Union lies in the richness of the soil and its geography. For the United States, Ukraine is a 'gateway through which Russian power, if it ever again assumed a hostile face, would be projected at Europe.'<sup>59</sup> A geopolitical alliance is therefore valuable for both parties. Recognizing and investigating the Ukrainian Famine is key in forming an alliance with Ukraine and is detrimental for the Soviet and now Russian rule over the nation. Ukraine became subjected to 'Russification' as a satellite state, meaning that all nationalistic symbols were discarded. Famine was ultimately, according to some, the 'culmination of a campaign to stamp out non-Russian national self-assertion.'<sup>60</sup> After the Second World War, many Ukrainians fled the country and settled in the United States creating a Ukrainian diaspora.

### 5.3 The United States' Government's reason for conducting the Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933

There are three explicit and implicit

<sup>59</sup> McCurdy, "The evolving U.S. Policy Toward Ukraine," 153.

<sup>60</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 4.

reasons for conducting the investigation to be found in the document: to spread awareness about the famine, to depict the Soviet Union as a danger and to victimise Ukrainians. To successfully convey a propagandic narrative beyond the United States, it required a unified and undivided attitude towards the Soviet Union amongst its citizens. Propaganda is a vessel for this unification.

It is stated as the primary goal that the investigation was to 'expand the world's knowledge of the famine' (Figure 1).<sup>61</sup> The reason for these aims are political. Conducting an investigation as such exposes details about the Famine that, when presented to the public correctly through means of 'truth-telling,' will convince the public of Soviet fallaciousness.

The investigation contains propagandic elements visible after conducting a discourse analysis. Throughout the document, the historic event is interchangeably referred to as 'Ukrainian Famine' or 'Holodomor.' The Famine is also continuously referred to as genocide. The choice of words is not politically neutral and the investigation is therefore partial in its approach towards the Ukrainian Famine.

Another reason for conducting the investigation and spreading awareness could have been guilt as a means to make amends for turning a blind eye. It is known that Western governments were blackmailed out of publishing about the famine, but that the occurrence of the

<sup>61</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), // catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, V.



famine was known by the President of the United States.<sup>62</sup> Attributively, other famine reports were similarly neglected (Figure 2). Lastly, since the consciousness about the Famine was generally low in Western countries, the United States bore responsibility in spreading awareness.<sup>63</sup>

There are two prominent 'roles' in the anti-Soviet propaganda campaign in the context of this investigation: the villain and the victim, corresponding to the Soviet Union and Ukraine. Victimhood is significant as it is often used for political purposes. Recognizing a party as a victim depicts them as non-agentive, thus having no power over themselves.<sup>64</sup> This often calls for monetary compensation and reinstatement for human rights. The latter is exemplified by Congressman Broomfield, a Committee Member in the investigation (1986), as he recognized the 'deplorable conditions' of human rights in the Soviet Union.<sup>65</sup> The investigation actively nurtures the victimisation of the Ukrainian people. This was done by emphasising that Ukrainians lost their independence as a result of 'Russian Soviet aggression' (Figure 3, section 'A').<sup>66</sup> It is also stated that the Soviet Union prevented Ukraine from becoming independent (Figure 3, section 'B' and 'C').

The Ukrainian Famine has long been absent from the public discourse, resulting in Ukrainians not being recognized as victims whilst this Famine is often referred to as Stalin's Holocaust (Figure 4).<sup>67</sup> The power of victimhood is visible in the legacy of the Holocaust. It is well-known and hardly disputed that Jewish people were systematically murdered during the Second World War. Nowadays, the Jewish people are recognized as the largest victim group of the Nazi regime. The systematic extermination of the Jewish people has provided little room for speculation whether it was a genocide or not, as there was an abundance of evidence. The legacy of the Ukrainian Famine however, has proven to provide contradicting evidence, making it more difficult to label it as genocide. Coining the word 'genocide' in 1944 was done to provide a name for the occurrence when entire populations of people were attempted to be wiped out. Whilst arguably genocides had occurred before the Second World War, no word had been invented to name such events. In one of his speeches, Lemkin explicitly refers to the 'Holodomor' as a genocide explicitly 'naming hunger as a weapon.'<sup>68</sup> Regardless of Lemkin's recognition, Ukrainians have not been successful in labeling the 'Holodomor' as genocide. This resulted in an absence of recognition of Ukrainian suffering during the Famine. As indicated, the suffering of the Jewish people have had less of a difficult path towards recognition of their suffering which results in them being able to dominate the narrative around the subject.<sup>69</sup> This recognition of suffering, and the corresponding status of victim, can be a strong political tool for pinpointing a villain and asking for compensation for the lives lost. This is known as the politics

<sup>62</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 57, 58.  
<sup>63</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 60.  
<sup>64</sup> Laura Jeffrey, Matei Candea, "The politics of victimhood," *History and Anthropology* 12, no 4 (November 2996): 289-290.  
<sup>65</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 60.  
<sup>66</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986.*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), //catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, 43.  
<sup>67</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 171.  
<sup>68</sup> Alex de Waal, *Mass Starvation*, 14-15.  
<sup>69</sup> Moore, "A Crime Against Humanity," 375.

of victimisation.<sup>70</sup> The investigation into the Ukrainian Famine was therefore similar to the Nuremberg trials in which the Jewish people were able to properly receive recognition for their suffering.<sup>71</sup> In parallel to that, the United States pursued its own geopolitical agenda. Their attempt to qualify the Ukrainian Famine as a genocide simultaneously pinpointed the Soviet Union as the power causing it and therefore bears responsibility for it.<sup>72</sup>

Another example of the victimisation of Ukrainians is the call for commemoration of the victims of the 'Holodomor' by Congressman Mica. He considers it justified to commemorate the 'Holodomor,' as the Holocaust is also being commemorated on American soil.<sup>73</sup>

#### 5.4 The United States' Government's utilisation of the Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933 (1986) for propaganda and 'truth-telling' purposes

Propaganda plays an important role in conveying a political narrative; this can be achieved through propaganda and other means of public attention. A continuous emphasis lies on broadcasting the investigation to the American public. In the section 'Scope of Work' the Commission outlines that they aim to educate children about the Famine. Education is an obvious choice as teaching about famine in curricula at high school and college level can have great impact.<sup>74</sup> The reasoning

<sup>70</sup> Moore, "A Crime Against Humanity," 371; Jeffrey, "The politics of victimhood," 289.

<sup>71</sup> Johan Dietsch, "Struggling with a 'Nuremberg Historiography' of the Holodomor," *Ab Imperio* 7 (2007): 140-142.

<sup>72</sup> Johan Dietsch, "Struggling with," 140.

<sup>73</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren,*

behind this is that young people are more easily 'moulded' into believing a certain governmental narrative. Whilst anti-Sovietism is not necessarily a subject disputed by the American public, teaching about the Ukrainian famine could create additional adversary opinions towards the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup> Another way of reaching the general public was through publishing about the investigation in newspapers.

It was the aim of the United States. to conduct the investigation conjoined with Ukraine. Nevertheless, this was not possible as Ukraine was still living under the dictatorial regime of the Soviet Union at the time. To spread news about the investigation, official press releases were to be issued to the media directed at the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup> During the Soviet reign over Ukraine there was an underground network that smuggled information into Ukraine. The hope was that the press releases would at some point reach these channels.

Spreading word about this investigation had political implications for the United States as it would create sympathy amongst the Ukrainians, and it would negatively influence Moscow's reputation on an international stage.

#### 5.5 Propagandic differences between the American investigation (1986) and the international inquiry (1990)

There are a few remarkable differences that can be noted in the comparison between the investigation and the inquiry: their partiality, potential Soviet participation in either of the documents, the usage of the word genocide, reason

*Michigan, November 24, 1986*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), // catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, 33.

<sup>75</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 5.

<sup>76</sup> United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine*, 22.

for conducting the investigation and the inquiry and outcome of the proceedings. Political neutrality throughout the process of any investigation or inquiry is important. Nonetheless, there are traces of partiality in the investigation (1986). This is partially due to the United States' government anti-Communist agenda. The committee working on the investigation consisted of only American citizens. To maintain neutrality, the inquiry's committee therefore consisted of members from several countries which would lead to a less polarising outcome.

The investigation and the inquiry have in common that they were financed by voluntary donations. Voluntary donations imply that there were third parties who were interested in having an investigation as such for their own purposes. Nonetheless, in the inquiry (1990), no commissioners were paid a remuneration from the donations, reinforcing the aim to be politically neutral.<sup>77</sup> Committee members on the investigation on the other hand, received a salary.

There was a difference in the testimonials in both documents. There was a mixture of testimonials from Europe, the United States and Canada utilised in the international inquiry (1990). This allows a formation of a more nuanced image of what happened. The investigation (1986) only interviewed naturalised American citizens.

Both documents referred to potential Soviet participation in the procedures, yet each addressed the matter differently. The introductory chapter of the international inquiry referred to Soviet participation in the inquiry (1990).<sup>78</sup>

77 International Commission, inquiry 1.

78 International Commission, inquiry 2.

Russian politician Mr Nicolai Ryzhkov was invited to contribute to the inquiry which involves the entire Soviet Union.<sup>79</sup> Whilst there was no response from Russia, Soviet involvement was immediately addressed in the document displaying urgency that was felt to conduct the inquiry rightfully. Accordingly, there is more emphasis on cooperation with the Soviet Union than in the investigation which indicates the openness. Furthermore, the international inquiry actively attempts to prevent the inquiry (1990) from causing any international stir by encouraging Soviet participation. In the United States' investigation (1986), there is a reference to a collaborative investigative effort with Ukraine only at page 34.<sup>80</sup> This is, however, not a collaboration with the Soviet Union, therefore blindsiding Moscow.

A discourse analysis of both the documents indicates that the word 'genocide' takes precedence over other ways of referring to the Famine in the international inquiry.<sup>81</sup> The reason for this is that the verdict of the inquiry is that the Famine was indeed a genocide. 'Ukrainian Famine' and the word 'Famine' were also used to refer to the event. The word 'Holodomor' does not occur. The political relevance of using 'Holodomor' is high therefore this indicates that the inquiry had a nuanced approach towards this historic event which is in line with the weight of the document. The American investigation on the other hand, uses the word genocide regularly and the

79 International Commission, inquiry 2.

80 United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986.* viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), // catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, 34.

81 International Commission; International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine; 1990; accessed April 2022, 2-3.

Famine is often referred to as 'Holodomor.'

The reasons for conducting the inquiry and the investigation are similar, except for one element: education and public attention. Whilst the inquiry does aim to reach and teach as many people as possible there is also less emphasis on changing curricula at schools or colleges as focus lies more on what transpired during the Famine. Therefore, the inquiry arguably had less propagandic purpose.

The outcome of the inquiry was addressed with similar care as the proceedings. The care is visible in the verdict that the committee finds itself unable to name the Famine a 'preconceived plan' to nurture 'success of Moscow's policies.'<sup>82</sup> Attributively, the committee failed to prove whether the Famine was systematically organised.<sup>83</sup> However, there was a consensus between both documents that it was worsened and utilised for political purposes.<sup>84</sup> Another nuanced approach by the inquiry was that they did not see the attack particularly aimed at Ukrainian nationalism but rather an intent to destroy the Ukrainian nation in its entirety.<sup>85</sup>

5.6 The extent to which the narrative created around the Ukrainian Famine by the United States' Government still resonates with contemporary geopolitics evolving the Ukrainian Famine

This thesis is written almost forty years after the investigation and the inquiry were finalised. Whilst the Cold War has ended, a war is unfolding between Russia and Ukraine, reinforcing old power struggles between the East and the West. The United States has

maintained dominance in the Western hemisphere, although not to the extent that it once had and the relation between East and West changed after the end of the Cold War. The American government had transitioned from being extremely opposed to the Soviet Union to gradually attempting to cooperate for world peace. However, relations soured again when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. The Soviet government arguably transitioned from a dictatorial regime to a more liberal regime. However, the Russian government has now been descending into a dictatorial regime.

Countries worldwide have only recently acknowledged the occurrence of the Famine. The Russo-Ukrainian War shed renewed light on the Famine and also reaffirmed old ties between Ukraine and the United States. The American publication *Time Magazine* naming Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky 'person of the year' 2022 exemplifies this. There is a specific reference to the 'Holodomor' in the article, as Zelensky's grandparents were survivors of the Famine.<sup>86</sup> Another direct reference to the Famine was made by *The Economist* when the winter of 2022 was compared to it. The article 'Winter War' refers to the winter months which could be lethal as Russians were attacking civilian electrical, water and heating systems.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that the attack on citizens' lifelines were aimed to wreck Ukraine's economy and aimed at 'battering the morale of Ukrainian troops.'<sup>88</sup> *The New York Times* even referred to Russia's aim to 'turn the cold of winter into a weapon of mass destruction'.<sup>89</sup>

86 Simon Shuster, "2022 Person of the Year," *Time*, December 26, 2022, 48.

87 "The Winter War," *The Economist*, December, 2022, 11.

88 "The Winter War," 11-12.

89 Carole Landry, "Winter Cold Becomes a Weapon in Ukraine: A barrage of Russian missiles causes power outages as temperatures drop," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/23/briefing/russia-ukraine-war-humanitarian-crisis.html>

82 International Commission, inquiry 5.

83 International Commission, inquiry, 5-6.

84 International Commission, inquiry, 5-6.

85 International Commission, inquiry, 6.

These publications, similarly to the American investigation (1986), evolve around Ukraine's victimisation and Russia's at times atrocious behaviour towards Ukraine.

## Conclusion

The Ukrainian Famine, in some contexts referred to as the 'Holodomor,' has arguably been one of the greatest hardships in eastern European history. The causes and the genocidal status of the Famine have been widely discussed by scholars. Whilst it was not in the interest of this paper to determine whether the Famine was a genocide or not, the label of genocide was in the interest of the United States' government.

During the Cold War, glasnost was introduced, creating openness to discuss whatever transpired in the Soviet Union. The United States utilised this newly gained openness to investigate the Ukrainian Famine in 1986. The dialectics in this investigation have shown how partial the American government was, as the word 'Holodomor' was frequently used, intentionally ignoring the question of whether it could have been a genocide. The States has long been a leading figure in the world whose actions have often been followed or copied. The investigation highlights the importance of education about the Famine and its media coverage. Both influence people and broadcast the truth that the American government wants its citizens to believe about the Famine and the Soviet Union. American hegemony over the Western hemisphere spreads this message beyond country borders, and results in Western countries having a negative world view of the Soviet Union.

## Figures

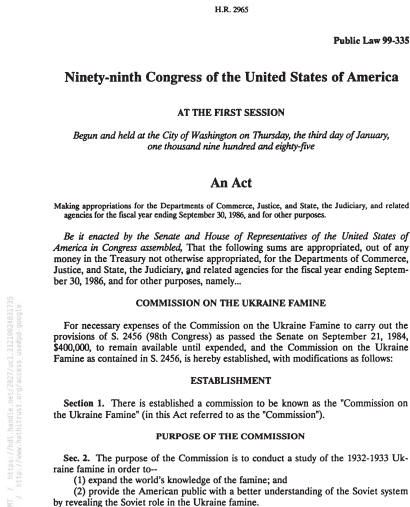


Figure 1: The Purpose of the Commission

Source: United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986.*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), //catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, V.

of the correspondence to the State Department relating to the famine comes after our recognition, with the exception of letters sent as early as March and April 1933 by the Menonite Central Committee in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, which did inform the Department of State, and the Office of the President that, indeed, there was a famine going on.

The first Ukrainian community organization to protest the famine officially in correspondence with the Department of State was *Soyuz Ukrainok Ameriky*, the Ukrainian Women's League, which adopted a resolution on the subject in late 1933. However, on the eve of recognition, there was a number of documents which do appear in State Department files.

An article from *Le Monde* of August 29, 1933, was translated and reported to the State Department by the American Mission in Paris in September 1933, that is, at the culmination of the famine, and on the eve of American recognition of the Soviet Union.

Also, in the fall of 1933, an inquiry was made by the Department of State to various missions in Europe. There is one such report from the American Legation to Greece, dated October 14th, 1933, which does indeed confirm the existence of famine on the basis of statements made by representatives of other powers which did have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. And a similar report from the American Mission to Latvia and Riga. These were obviously ignored.

**Mr. MARCHSHIN:** Thank you. I assume that this will be included in the final report.

**Dr. MACE:** Yes, it will.

Would the Commissioners wish a packet of these documents to be sent to them? That can be done.

**Fin.** that will be duplicated and sent to all members.

**Dr. KUROPAS:** When we receive these documents, are they now public documents? Can we share them with the press—

**Dr. MACE:** Yes, all State documents from the early 1930s are declassified and are in the public domain. They can be used, cited, and quoted. They are not classified documents today.

**Mr. MARCHSHIN:** Okay, if there aren't any other questions—

**Ambassador DOUGLAS:** Mr. Chairman, you left on the table the question of the budget.

**Mr. MARCHSHIN:** I am going to get to that. I just wanted to get the report completely out of the way, and then I want to go on to the budget.

**Ambassador DOUGLAS:** And we can dispense with that quickly, so that we will have ample time for Dr. Conquest.

**Mr. MARCHSHIN:** Yes, I would like to entertain a recommendation for accepting the report.

**Dr. KUROPAS:** I would like to go on record as thanking Dr. Mace and the other members of the staff for the amount of help that I, personally, have received in the development of the curriculum materials, as well as the development of the Ukrainian Famine Institute that we will hold on November 8th.

And I also want to go on record as thanking Undersecretary Gary Bauer for agreeing to come to our institute. As some of you may be aware, this particular institute

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Figure 2: Signs of feelings of guilt

Source: United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986.*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S.

## MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

POLITICAL CAUSES OF THE FAMINE-GENOCIDE IN UKRAINE  
1932-1933Volodymyr Kosyk  
(Historian, Paris)

Ukraine, which had been a sovereign state for three years, lost its independence in November 1920 as a result of Russian Soviet aggression. Existing at first as a supposedly "independent" Soviet republic, it was incorporated into the Soviet Union which was created by the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks in December 1922. (Of 2,215 delegates that supported the decision to create the U.S.S.R., 2,092 delegates—with an overwhelming majority being Russians—were party members; in 1922, Ukrainians constituted only 3% of the membership).

The years 1923-1928 were marked by an easing up of the economic regime (period of N.E.P.: New Economic Policy), and by efforts at Ukrainization. This was a period when even official literature indicated that Ukrainian authors should turn away from Moscow and turn to Europe (M. Khvyliovyi), and that, like before the revolution, the Ukrainian economy was still in a colonial state; there was no advantage, therefore, in Ukraine being a member of the U.S.S.R. (M. Voloskyev). Outside Ukraine's borders, an active Ukrainian government-in-exile sought out allies among western powers with the intention of helping Ukraine re-establish her independence.

But Russia remained a powerful adversary to Ukraine's independence. She did not want to lose Ukraine's natural wealth and resources. In 1925-26, Ukraine's input into the Soviet Union's productivity was large: 81% coal, 68% iron ore, 77% cast iron, and 82% sugar. In 1927, Ukraine contributed 80% coal, 85% iron ore, 70% metals and played a vital role in machinery manufacturing and in providing raw materials to a wide range of food processing and light industries in the U.S.S.R.<sup>1</sup>

Moscow did everything within its power to prevent Ukraine from separating from the Soviet Union. At the 10th All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets (April 6-13, 1927), the head of the Peoples' Commissars of the Ukrainian S.S.R., Vlas Chubar, reminded the meeting that, "There are some who attempt to separate Ukraine from the Union." During the first half of 1927, the tension between Russian and the western powers became sharpened. As a result of Anglo-Soviet diplomatic incidents in China and London, and because of the Communist International supported the English coal strikes,

1. *Rozvytok narodnoho hospodarstva Ukrainy R.S.R., 1917-1927* (Development of Commerce and Industry in the Ukrainian S.S.R., 1917-1927), vol. 1, Kiev, 1927, p. 274; *Ispravny nobytsyokoh klasu rob R.S.R. (History of the Working Class of the Ukrainian S.S.R.)*, vol. 2, Kiev, 1927, p. 134.  
2. *Ukraina i zanzhynny svit* (Ukraine and the Foreign World), Kiev, 1970, p. 220.

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peasement mentality continues among many in high places in the West—and even in our own community.

All too many say, "That was Stalin. That was fifty years ago. Things are different now." Were that true!

Fifty years ago, more than seven million Ukrainians were killed in Stalin's massive Holocaust, which in numbers and terror far exceeded that of Hitler, whose name now symbolizes the term. But for Ukrainians, the Holocaust continues today. Systematic purges of anyone expressing any views of nationalism or freedom take place continually in the Soviet Union. In 1968, when many Ukrainians began to identify with their neighbors to the west, with the freedom being expressed in the famous "Czechoslovakian Spring", many hundreds, even thousands of Ukrainians who spoke or wrote of freedom were summarily seized and with or without trial were sentenced to long terms of prison, slave labor and exile. Many did not survive. Today, well authenticated reports show that of the political prisoners, inmates of the Gulag Archipelago system of slave labor camps, the largest numbers are Ukrainians who ask only freedom for their own land and people.

For those unfamiliar with its meaning, the word "Russification" may sound a little too nice to be what it actually means in human terms. Russification has been and remains the policy of Moscow and Russia toward the Ukrainians and all other national minorities in the country. In 1870, Minister of Education Lev Tolstoy said: "The ultimate goal in the education of the non-Russians must be their Russification and assimilation within the Russian nation."

A few years later, the famous Russian novelist, Feodor Dostoyevsky, wrote: "All people should become Russian, and Russian above all else, because the Russian nation idea is universal..."

One hundred years later, we hear another famous Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, from his exile in America, saying much the same things in his dream of a future Russia-in-his Russia.

For Yuri Andropov and the Russian rulers in the Kremlin, any manifestation of nationalism is viewed as a direct and serious threat to Russian communist ideology—the evil mortar that keeps the whole structure of communism together. Nationalism is a basic threat because it denies the idea that communism is an international unifying force. More simply, as long as there is one Ukrainian nationalist anywhere making a claim for his nation and its rights, communism is threatened. In a moment of unusual candor, Lenin said, "Scratch a communist, and you'll wound a Great Russian chauvinist." Today, as for well over three hundred years, there is but only policy for the Moscow masters—crush the Ukrainians and Russify them!

That is the fact, the truth, the terrible reality of life in Ukraine today.

I do not feel that you invited me in order to hear either vacuous platitudes or wildly optimistic forecasts about freedom for Ukraine. As something of a concerned specialist, and one who watches the pattern of world events fairly closely, I would be less than candid were I to say that today there is a bright light at the end of the long dark Ukrainian tunnel. There are many negative signs, perhaps the most important, the destruction of the Helsinki Watch Committees.

On the other hand, slowly but surely there is among Americans and others in the free world a growing recognition of the fact that in the freedom and independence of

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Figure 3: Victimization of the Ukrainians

Source: United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986...*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), //catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, 43.

Figure 4: Ukrainian Famine as Holocaust for the Ukrainians

Source: United States., *Investigation of the Ukrainian famine, 1932-1933: first interim report of meetings and hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine, held in 1986: ... Washington, D.C., April 23, 1986 ... Washington, D.C., October 8, 1986 ... Glen Spey, New York, October 26, 1986 ... Chicago, Illinois, November 7, 1986 ... Warren, Michigan, November 24, 1986...*, viii, 172 p. (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1987), // catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/101681488, 171.



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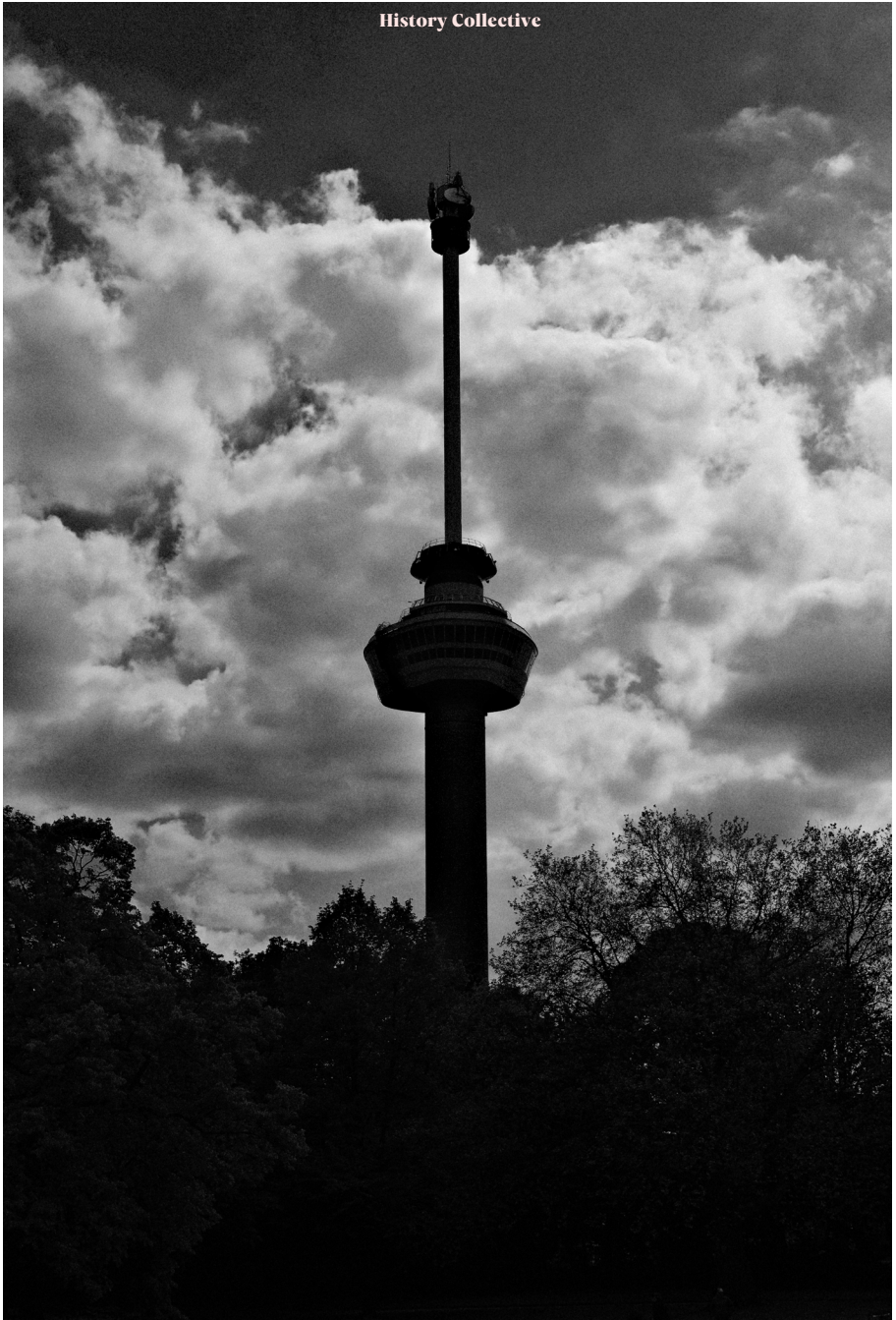
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United States Government; *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932-1933*; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31210024831735&view=1up&seq=1;1988>; accessed December 2022.





# **The Interpretation of Greek Virtue Ethics in Classical Islamic Philosophy**

*By Wyatt Top*

## Abstract

The philosophy of the Ancient Greeks was translated and maintained by the philosophers of Classical Islam who restated and reinvented the ideas developed by thinkers such as Aristotle to fit the unique needs and conditions of both their historical context and religious cosmology.

## Introduction

The philosophy of virtue theory, the ethical theory that explores morality based on one's characteristics, has been making a comeback since the latter half of the twentieth century, specifically with the works of such philosophers as Elizabeth Anscombe (d. 2001), Philippa Foot (d. 2010) and Rosalind Hursthouse.<sup>1</sup> However, the process has been slow and has not spread much further than a niche circle of contemporary armchair philosophers. There have been other times in history where a similar process of revival of these ideas has happened, carrying potential insights applicable to our contemporary context. One of the most significant cases of this sort of revival arising, especially in terms of the scope of population to which it applied, is the reinvention of Hellenistic virtue ethics in the context of the so-called "Islamic Golden Age". In this context, the theological content of the revelation of Muhammad provided a basis upon which the philosophers of the time could learn about and consequently reproduce the philosophy of the ancient Greeks in the light of their own context

<sup>1</sup> Anscombe is credited for reviving academic interest in virtue ethics in her 1958 essay *Modern Moral Philosophy*. Foot is known for her modernization of virtue ethics in her 1978 book *Virtues and Vices* as well as her 2001 book *Natural Goodness*. Hursthouse, one of the leading contemporary advocates for virtue ethics, is known for her 1999 book *On Virtue Ethics*.

and worldview. Learning about the transmission of virtue ethics into the classical Islamic philosophical corpus can help us to understand the role that religion plays in the production of ethical thought, as well as how we might be able to address the current issues of the contemporary world in our own modern day reinvention of virtue theory.

This paper will explore the historical context of the Classical Islamic philosophers, focusing on how the thinkers Miskawayh (d. 1030) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111) interacted with and reinvented Aristotle's virtue ethics. Starting with a brief overview of the historical context of these writers as well as the original philosophical content of Aristotle's writings, it will analyze the writings of both of these critical thinkers and how their respective accounts of certain virtues can highlight their differences and similarities. Subsequently, this essay will explore how Miskawayh championed the virtue theory which Aristotle proposed, wrapping it in a light that reflected the values of his Islamic context. Addressing the evolution of ideas that takes place between Miskawayh's writings and the works of the latter, al-Ghazali will help us to understand the process of reinvention that took place during this period of human history. What will have to be disclosed before the start of this exposition is that both the lives, influences, and philosophies expressed by these two philosophers are much grander than the scope that this paper can explore. This paper represents only the most brief exploration of these topics.

## The Historical Context of the Classical Islamic Philosophers

Both Miskawayh and al-Ghazali were thinkers during the height of the Abbasid Caliphate. Miskawayh performed most of his work during the tenth century A.D., while al-Ghazali did his important work in the following century. Nadia Gamal al-Din describes the tenth century "...as one of the most brilliant periods of Islamic civilization; during this time Muslims reached the peak of their intellectual maturity and progressing ideas. Indeed, a number of historians have seen it as the 'Golden Age' of this outstanding civilization."<sup>2</sup> During this time, a number of intellectual traditions flourished that brought about groundbreaking new ideas, methods, and technologies. Advancements were made in optics, astronomy, geometry, mathematics and of course philosophy. The teachings of Islam bid the acquisition of knowledge on the believer, making the religious context of this time a major factor for these new developments. One Hadith, a collection of the sayings and stories of the prophet Muhammad, declares that "...seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim."<sup>3</sup>

This period is characterized by the translation of works from other languages, notably Greek, into the Arabic language, which "...also stimulated a flourish of writing in Arabic, once the translation process had yielded results."<sup>4</sup> William Montgomery Watt notes that with the translation of these foreign and often ancient scientific and philosophical sources, an influx of new ideas came

into the discourse of the Caliphate. The Caliphs noticed the effects of these new ideas and began to invest financially into the development of research subjects, such as medicine, astrology, and mathematics for the benefit of the empire.<sup>5</sup> Watt writes that it was "...out of the work of translation that the independent philosophical movement grew in the Islamic world"<sup>6</sup> and that the inclusion of philosophical academia could have been "...because it was so closely linked with the other branches of Greek learning."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this period of history produced many great philosophical works, notably the works from Miskawayh and al-Ghazali which will help us understand how this Islamic context helped reinvent Hellenistic virtue ethics.

Miskawayh was a Persian philosopher from the tenth century. Living and working primarily in Baghdad, he is most known for his contributions to Islamic ethical thought.<sup>8</sup> Miskawayh's own thought, as well as the influence that Plato and Aristotle had on it, is most clearly demonstrated in his book *The Refinement of Character and Purification of Dispositions* (Tahdhib al-Akhlaq wa-Tathir al-A'raq).<sup>9</sup> This book represents a reiteration of the ethical philosophy of the Greeks. The *Refinement* also constitutes the first major ethical written work in the Islamic corpus. According to al-Din, "...he indicated clearly and distinctly the sources on which he drew," showing a precise, and in a deep sense, honouring exploration of these works which were at the time "...well known and widespread throughout the Islamic community."<sup>10</sup> What is interesting about the *Refinement* is that it "...did not

5 W. M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (n.p.: ABC International Group, 2002), 28.

6 Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 26-27.

7 Watt, 28.

8 Al-Din, "Miskawayh," 131-2.

9 Al-Din, 132.

9 Al-Din, 132-33.

2 Nadia Gamal al-Din, "Miskawayh," *Prospects* 24, no. 1-2 (1994): 131.

3 Sunan Ibn Majah, 224th Hadith.

4 Al-Din, "Miskawayh," 131.



aim for a reconciliation between religion and philosophy [...]. Nor did it try to combine them."<sup>11</sup> It simply aims at the reproduction of the virtue ethics of the Greeks in the garb of Miskawayh's Islamic environment and cultural worldview, but without limiting it to the specific cosmology of Islam. It retains the original goals of Aristotelian virtue ethics: in Al-Din's words, "...Miskawayh's book prepares the way to reach supreme happiness for anyone examining its contents."<sup>12</sup>

Al-Ghazali, honorifically titled the *Proof of Islam* (or *Hujjat al-Islam*), was a Persian philosopher-theologian from the eleventh century. He wrote many works on a variety of different subjects, ranging from science to religion, but he is most known for his unique blending of philosophy and theology, as well as his complicated relationship with both. He became a known scholar in Baghdad, maintaining a high position at the al-Nizamiyya of Baghdad, one of the most significant universities of the medieval world. He eventually rose to the position of legal advisor to the Caliph. In his later career, he reached a crisis in which he briefly lost his ability to speak, and turned his thoughts to the purpose of life as well as the importance of the afterlife. During this time he became heavily involved in Sufism, a sect of Islam focused on the esoteric teachings of the Qur'an and inner spiritual growth, directing his thoughts and works on ethics and the use of logic in theological discourses.<sup>13</sup> According to Watt, this period of crisis "...must have been due in part to a realization that the rational arguments at the foundation of Islamic theology were not fully rational, but rest on many assumptions which

could not be rationally justified."<sup>14</sup> His attempt to combine then, reason and theology, led to a profound overhaul of the Islamic worldview, basing theological understandings on rational grounds, as well as, according to Frank Griffel, removing rational questions "...from the realm of pure rational knowledge and assign[ing] their answer to [...] revelation."<sup>15</sup> His blending of the philosophical method and theology was significant in scope, and has influenced the majority of the Islamic academic discourse since.<sup>16</sup> This revolutionary understanding led to more of a *reinvention* of Hellenistic virtue ethics than Miskawayh had done, as will be later discussed. This reinvention is made most evident in his works *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*) in Arabic and later in his more compressed Farsi work *The Alchemy of Happiness* (*Kimiya-yi Sa'adat*).

## Aristotle and Virtue Theory

In order to explore the process of reinvention that took place in the context of Classical Islamic philosophy, we need to understand what virtue theory is and what it meant to the Ancient Greeks. Our focus will be placed on Aristotle's (d. 322 BC) *Nicomachean Ethics*, as this is the source most actively engaged with by both Miskawayh and al-Ghazali. It is also the source that best sums up the general ideas that the Greeks constructed. In his treatise on ethics, Aristotle bases what is right for humans on their character; those character traits which are good for one to have are those that lead to a human being's best sense of well-being. The cosmological purpose for virtue theory in Aristotle's work is defined by

11 Al-Din, 133.

12 Al-Din, 133.

13 Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19-51.

14 Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 52.

15 Griffel, *Al-Ghazali Philosophical Theology*, 98-99.

16 Griffel, 62.

the "Function Argument," which builds a picture in which things are considered "good" when they are operating according to their highest function.<sup>17</sup>

*The function that humanity does not share with animals and plants, according to Aristotle, is rational thought. It is rationality, therefore, which is a specifically human function. Through the exercise of rationality, man fulfills the basic function of his nature. This intellectual capacity, according to him, has a theoretical and a practical side to it and intellectual virtues of theoretical and practical wisdom are based on it.*<sup>18</sup>

Happiness, according to Aristotle, is a condition of the soul when it lives in accordance with virtue. This, to Aristotle, is a sort of fruition of humanity, claiming that our happiness is constituted by flourishing according to our capacities as human beings. He calls this state *eudaimonia*. The virtues of humanity, according to Aristotle, are defined as a state of character that empowers us to perform well as human beings. The virtues that Aristotle defines (such as courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom) are about feelings and actions, and these feelings and actions can be performed and felt appropriately or inappropriately, depending on how one interacts with them in an ethically relevant situation. For example, in the context of courage, one might find themselves feeling and acting too much out of fear or perhaps out of rash stupidity instead of a realistic and contextually constrained amount of courage. Aristotle states that "...having these feelings at the right times, about

the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue."<sup>19</sup> In this way, Aristotle defines virtues as a conditioned middle point between the extremes of too much and too little of a specific characteristic. This middle point is relative to both ourselves and the situations that we find ourselves in. Defining these states of character as such, being relative to us each as individuals and our specific needs and capacities, makes for a fluid mode of ethical operation.

Aristotle describes the process of acquiring specific virtues as being through a process that he calls "habituation". Habituation is defined primarily as a practice of acting in the way one would act if one already possessed that virtue in the relevant situations they are presented by. He uses the example of the strongman, who because of his strength is able to perform a lot of hard labour, but it is through this hard labour that he became strong in the first place.<sup>20</sup> One of the virtues that will be explored, as it will likewise be relevant in exploring Miskawayh and al-Ghazali, is justice, which is an interesting virtue in Aristotle's ethics because it is described as a supreme virtue for it represents what he calls "...complete virtue in relation to another."<sup>21</sup> In this way, justice represents the virtue of having all of one's virtues working in balanced coordination with one another, each one complementing its corresponding constituents. Aristotle quotes a proverb, saying: "And in justice all virtue is summed up."<sup>22</sup> Being a just human, then, is the highest goal of virtue ethics. This is the state of happiness and flourishing that humans can and, according to Greek thought, should strive

17 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 7.

18 M. Ashraf Adeel, "Moderation in Greek and Islamic Tradition, and a Virtue Ethics of the Qur'an," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 32, no. 3 (2015): 10.

19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapter 6.

20 Aristotle, Book II, Chapter 2.

21 Aristotle, Book V, Chapter 1.

22 Aristotle, Book V, Chapter 1.

towards. Now that a basic understanding of Aristotle's account of virtue ethics has been established, it will be explored how these concepts are expressed by the two classical Islamic philosophers.

## An Overview of Miskawayh

Ali Rizek describes Miskawayh as "...a representative of a generation of philosophers who were exposed to a flow of [Hellenistic] philosophical ideas that they were set to refine and synthesize."<sup>23</sup> Miskawayh was one of the most influential moral philosophers of his time, and his work is still taught in many schools throughout the Islamic world today. What made him so well known was his transmission of the Hellenistic virtue ethics into the Islamic world. Concisely, Miskawayh rewrites the core philosophy of the Nicomachean Ethics, redressing it in the garb of Islamic cosmological values. Most of Aristotle's ideas translated smoothly into Miskawayh's version of virtue theory and needed no change; however, Miskawayh synthesized other Greek philosophical ideas to make the structure of Aristotelian virtue ethics fit his Islamic context.

Miskawayh's *The Refinement of Character* (Tahdhib al-Akhlaq) centres itself around the idea of the happiness of the soul, *sa'adat al-nafs*, which greatly resembles Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*. The happiness of the soul for Miskawayh leads one to ultimate happiness and is "...achieved through the acquisition of knowledge and sciences."<sup>24</sup> This acquisition of knowledge is defined

<sup>23</sup> Ali Rida K. Rizek, "An Art That is Learned and Acquired," in *Islamic Ethics as Educational Discourse: Thought and Impact of the Classical Muslim Thinker Miskawayh*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Yassir El Jamouhi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 282.

<sup>24</sup> Ali Rida K. Rizek, "An Art That is Learned and Acquired," 268.

primarily in the works of Miskawayh as practical knowledge, the knowledge of what to do in the situations that life presents one with. He describes this practical knowledge as *infadhu ma 'alimahu 'amalan*, which translates into "doing what is painful for one to do."<sup>25</sup> To Miskawayh, this mode of practical action is attained through "...steady and continuous habitue..."<sup>26</sup> The acquisition of virtues and characteristics is therefore defined by the same habituation that Aristotle describes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Likewise, Miskawayh defines the nature of the virtues that one adorns their characters with as *means*; he creates his own unique imagery for understanding the "means between extremes" that virtues are understood as being. Using the example of the geometrical dimensions of a circle, he describes the circumference as extremities of vice, while describing the center point of this circle as the extreme point away from the circumference.

*In this way, we should understand the meaning of virtue as a mean, for it lies between vices and virtue deviates the least bit from its particular location, it comes near to another vice and becomes defective in proportion to its nearness to that vice towards which it tends. ... Thus, it is very hard to achieve this mean, and to keep it once it is achieved is harder. It is in this sense that the philosophers have said: To hit the target point is more difficult than to miss it, and to keep hitting it afterwards without missing it is still harder and more difficult.*<sup>27</sup>

This imagery intensifies the original Aristotelian definition of the mean, making

<sup>25</sup> Ali Rida K. Rizek, 271.

<sup>26</sup> Ali Rida K. Rizek, 269.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character: A Translation from the Arabic of Ahmad Ibn-Muhammad Miskawayh's Tahdhib Al-Akhlaq* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 22.

it very clear that this mean is not just a mere balance, but a definite point that can be infinitely clarified and further defined. One can calculate more and more precisely the center point of a geometrical circle indefinitely, coming to infinitely more and more precise definitions of the exact point of its mean. The circle analogy of the mean in virtue will help us to understand the Islamic influence that is built into Miskawayh's remodel of virtue theory in the following paragraph. Miskawayh additionally defines the virtue of justice in a *similar* way to the Aristotelian model, as a balance of equilibriums between all the other virtues: temperance, courage, wisdom and their counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

One of the Hellenistic ideas that Miskawayh synthesized is the neoplatonic, namely Iamblichan, idea that there is a similarity or resemblance between mankind and its capacities and the Divine, or the One.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, the Islamic cosmological purpose of mankind, as souls originating from and ultimately returning to God, bearing some sort of unique (limitedly) similitive relationship to their Creator, expresses itself quite naturally within the framework of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Miskawayh argues that the happiness of the soul, *sa'adat al-nafs*, in its highest degree attempts "...to follow the example of the First Cause [Allah] and to imitate Him and His activities."<sup>30</sup> Hans Daiber suggests that Miskawayh modifies the cosmological purpose of mankind in Aristotle's work, which states that mankind should live

according to the highest capacity of their being. Miskawayh emphasizes mankind's "most divine element", saying "[t]he love of wisdom, the devotion to the intellectual conception, and the use of divine notions are characteristic of the divine part in man."<sup>31</sup> The purpose of acquiring virtues and habituating one's character thus becomes, in the ethics of Miskawayh, the soul's ultimate mission in its infinite journey towards God. Hence, the circle analogy for the means of virtue points to the infinite progression of the soul towards, and in increasing likeness to, its infinitely and immeasurably exalted Creator. "For religion is a divine condition which leads men voluntarily to supreme happiness."<sup>32</sup> Thus, the religious context for Miskawayh's *Refinement* is fundamental, albeit not limiting, to his philosophy. Religion is what gives the structure of virtue theory its practical relevance in the heart of the observer, setting them on a journey towards the Divine and, consequently, their soul's purpose and ultimate satisfaction.

## An Overview of al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali, has a far more intricate and nuanced relationship with Hellenistic virtue ethics. It is apparent in his works that his relationship with philosophy in general is really unique. He critiques a lot of the philosophy of his time, expressing concern that the philosophers' own views are interfering with the truth of their works.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned earlier, al-Ghazali attempts to combine reason and theology in an innovative way to overcome his frustrations with both. The lack of rational

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Daiber, "Ethics as Likeness to God in Miskawayh: An Overlooked Tradition," in *Islamic Ethics as Educational Discourse: Thought and Impact of the Classical Muslim Thinker Miskawayh*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Yassir El Jamouhi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 83-84.

<sup>30</sup> Daiber, "Ethics as Likeness to God in Miskawayh: An Overlooked Tradition," 78.

<sup>31</sup> Daiber, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character: A Translation from the Arabic of Ahmad Ibn-Muhammad Miskawayh's Tahdhib Al-Akhlaq* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 128.

<sup>33</sup> Muhammad Abul Quasem, "Al-Ghazali's Rejection of Philosophic Ethics," *Islamic Studies* 13, no. 2 (1974): 113.

argument in the theological discourse of his time and the lack of foundational bases for truth in philosophy lead him to place religion as the basis for his philosophical thought. This way, one could look critically at the world and develop their characters and remain consistently tied to the Islamic Revelation, which is the source of his worldview.<sup>34</sup>

One example of how this looked, is al-Ghazali's understanding of the doctrine of the mean in virtue theory. Muhammad Abul Quasem illustrates, in an article that helps us understand Al-Ghazali's fundamental thought process in this context, that most of the Islamic philosophers during this time, Miskawayh included, were mostly influenced by Hellenistic sources in their expositions of the doctrine of the mean. The Qur'an, however, independently of Greek influence prescribes ideas similar to the doctrine of the mean in places such as Surah 25:67, which describes the virtuous as "...those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor miserly, and [are] moderate in between (the two extremes)."<sup>35</sup> According to Quasem, al-Ghazali "...laid tremendous stress on this doctrine and was emphatic in showing that the mean was the central theme of the ethics of the Qur'an and Tradition [the Hadith], and that the life of the companions of the Prophet was modelled according to it."<sup>36</sup> It is through basing his philosophical tendencies, which very much do reflect the thought of Aristotle, on the dispensational elements of the Revelation of Muhammad that al-Ghazali forms the breadth of his thought. By not just rewriting the corpus of virtue theory in an Islamic light, but by reworking its core fundamentally from

the scope of the Qur'an and Hadith, al-Ghazali does not merely transmit Hellenistic philosophy into his context, but rather reinvents virtue theory from an indigenously Islamic standpoint.

In a similar fashion to Miskawayh and Aristotle, al-Ghazali defines virtues by the medium point between two vicious extremities. "Good character," explains Mohamed Ahmed Sherif in *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*, "therefore, lies in this state of the middle way. The middle way, however, depends on states and circumstances, i.e., it is a relative mean."<sup>37</sup> This clearly reflects the entirety of the discourse so far, understanding virtues as a middle point between destructive deficiencies and excesses of feelings and actions. Al-Ghazali also presents a metaphor of a circle, similar to the one by Miskawayh, to describe this point. He paints the picture of an ant which is surrounded by a circle of flames, and in this affair the ant can be seen as wanting to maintain itself at the exact central point of the circle in order to keep itself at the safest possible distance from the heat of the flames.<sup>38</sup> In a way that reflects Miskawayh's mean as the extreme point between two extremes, al-Ghazali builds a vision of the doctrine of the mean as a point of safety, and the extremity and deficiency of the vices as characteristics that bring us harm.

Ghazali's interpretation of the doctrine of habituation is especially interesting. In a manner that resembles Miskawayh and Aristotle, he bids that one practices good deeds continually so that they may become habits and thus part of their character.<sup>39</sup> However, instead of being placed within the context of Hellenistic philosophy, al-Ghazali includes prayer and the appealing

34 Griffel, *Al-Ghazali Philosophical Theology*, 98-101.

35 Qur'an 25:67.

36 Quasem, "Al-Ghazali's Rejection of Philosophic Ethics," 124.

37 Muhamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1975), 34.

38 Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*, 34.

39 Sherif, 33.

to Divine guidance as a means of acquiring the state of the mean in one's virtues.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the concept of "Divine generosity" presents itself in his works as a form of habituation, making the relationship that one has with their Creator a central part of the process of attaining to virtue.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Ghazali describes Divine guidance as a virtue in itself, which exists as a precondition for other virtues. Quoting Surah 20:50, "...Our Lord is the One who gave everything its due shape, then guided it...,"<sup>42</sup> Ghazali attributes the bringing about of virtues to the Divine.<sup>43</sup> The virtue of justice in al-Ghazali's philosophy is also unique compared to the previous two thinkers. Justice is not seen as a totality of the virtues, but a virtue in its own right.<sup>44</sup> It remains defined in a sense of "...bringing about a harmony among the faculties of the soul," but it is understood by Ghazali not as the end, but as a foundation which is described as "...preparing the individual for superior virtues."<sup>45</sup> These superior virtues, often described as the "mystical virtues," reflect the influence of Sufism in Ghazali's work: These virtues represent, instead of the everyday feelings and actions described by the traditional virtues, feelings and actions determined by an intense sense of spirituality. Sherif describes this realm of Ghazali's work as "...a special kind of psychological ethics, one which aims at nearness to God."<sup>46</sup> These mystical virtues include repentance, the fear of God, asceticism, and the love of God among others, and they exist in a sort of hierarchy, each one existing as a prerequisite for the next and culminating in a state of love.<sup>47</sup> Meditation

is an important aspect in the practice of the mystical virtues specifically, including the meditation on one's self, but most importantly the meditation on the essence and attributes of God.<sup>48</sup>

For al-Ghazali, the happiness of the soul and the flourishing of the human being that is a result of the living of a virtuous life is not something that is fundamentally about one's life in this world. The truest, fullest happiness and the true capacity of mankind, then, lies in the Hereafter.<sup>49</sup> Similarly to Miskawayh, the journey of the soul is never ending and in a constant progression towards and continuously reflecting the attributes of God. Al-Ghazali goes into more detail on the driving force being mankind's infinite progression towards God than the other thinkers, taking steps to develop the idea of similitude between humanity and the Divine that Miskawayh sets forth. The primary motivating factor behind the soul's infinite progression towards God is mankind's "Attraction to Beauty." Sophia Vasalou addresses this process in her paper *Al-Ghazali and Moral Beauty*, where she describes the Sufi influence on al-Ghazali's work, "...where the idea of God's transcendent beauty—which worldly entities either naturally manifest or normatively seek to emulate—formed a cynosure of spiritual preoccupation."<sup>50</sup> The Greek word *kalon*, which describes in one of its meanings the beauty of one's character in many philosophical texts, corresponds to the Arabic words *jamil* and *hasan*, which al-Ghazali used interchangeably. While these terms often talk about the beauty of the world, or of one's outward appearance, Ghazali uses terms such as *hasan al-khuluq* to

40 Sherif, 27.

41 Sherif, 31.

42 Qur'an 20:50.

43 Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*, 80.

44 Quasem, "Al-Ghazali's Rejection of Philosophic Ethics," 121.

45 Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*, 73.

46 Sherif, 123.

47 Sherif, 124.

48 Sherif, 122-23.

49 Sherif, 72.

50 Sophia Vasalou, *Al-Ghazali and the Idea of Moral Beauty* (n.p.: Routledge, 2021), 3.

describe the inward beauty of those with a virtuous character.<sup>51</sup> The meditation on God's essence and attributes bidden by Ghazali in the acquisition of virtues builds a cosmology of virtue theory where "... it is the aesthetic response produced by God's attributes—the sense of awe, wonder, and reverence aroused by their grandeur and splendour— that provides the impetus for the ethical striving to acquire them for ourselves."<sup>52</sup> In this way, he places aesthetic beauty at the center of ethical deliberation, both as a means of attracting humans towards the acquisition of virtues, but also as a means of attracting humans towards the beauty of God, who exemplifies all of the virtues.<sup>53</sup>

This exemplification of the beauty of the virtues and the virtues themselves brings us to a key element of Islam that likewise influences al-Ghazali's work: the tradition of the 99 names of Allah. Explored primarily in al-Ghazali's *The Highest Aim in Explaining the Meaning of God's Most Beautiful Names*, the tradition of the 99 names of Allah brings to attention the depth of the virtue ethics already laden in the cosmology of Islam. Originating from both the Qur'an and the Hadith, the 99 names represent different attributes and qualities of Allah that the adherents of Islam reflect on and try to enact in their day-to-day lives. These names include *The Compassionate* (al-Rahman), *The Merciful* (al-Rahim), and *The Just* (al-'Adl) to name a few. One important clarification in this regard, as well as in the case of Miskawayh, is not to establish a one-to-one identity between mankind and God. To avoid equivocation, al-Ghazali posits an "unbridgeable chasm" between mankind and its Creator. Albeit this gap is

not meant to interfere with one's aspiration to conduct the soul's infinite journey of continuing to grow gradually closer to, and reflecting to continuously higher degrees the virtues of, Allah.<sup>54</sup> This seeming conflict presents a paradox between the incomparability and comparability in the Islamic teachings that is meant to inspire depth in meditation. As Yousef Casewit describes, "[a] divine name thus denotes a certain property, characteristic, and quality of the Essence that we cannot fully fathom. What we glean from a name is in relation to us."<sup>55</sup> In *The Alchemy of Happiness*, al-Ghazali exclaims that:

*Not only are man's attributes a reflection of God's attributes, but the mode of existence of man's soul affords some insight into God's mode of existence. That is to say, both God and the soul are invisible, indivisible, unconfined by space and time, and outside the categories of quantity and quality; nor can the ideas of shape, colour, or size attach them. People find it hard to form a conception of such realities as are devoid of quality and quantity, etc., but a similar difficulty attaches to the conception of our everyday feelings, such as anger, pain, pleasure, or love.*<sup>56</sup>

It is in this realm of Islamic tradition, though, that al-Ghazali fundamentally bases his virtue ethics, noting that ethical conduct cannot be arrived at primarily through pure reason, but by scriptural guidance, "... at whose heart lies the divine names."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Yousef Casewit, "Al-Ghazali's Virtue Ethical Theory of the Divine Names: The Theological Underpinnings of the Doctrine of Takhalluq in Al-Maqṣad Al-Asnā," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4 no.1-2 (2020): 158.

<sup>55</sup> Casewit, "Al-Ghazali's Virtue Ethical Theory of the Divine Names," 185.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. Claud Field (London: Octagon, 2001), 32.

<sup>57</sup> Casewit, "Al-Ghazali's Virtue Ethical Theory of the Divine Names," 160-61.

<sup>51</sup> Vasalou, *Al-Ghazali and the Idea of Moral Beauty*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Vasalou, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Vasalou, 16.



## The Transmission Process from the Greeks to the Classical Islamic Philosophers

To analyze the process of transmission of ethical thought from the ancient Greeks to the period of Classical Islamic thought, the focus will be on a few key virtues and how both Miskawayh and al-Ghazali interpreted them. This paper will focus on the virtue of moderation and the virtue of greatness of soul respectively, as these will help to illustrate the manner in which these Classical Islamic thinkers interacted with specific Greek ideas. These virtues will highlight the cultural and religious influences that the context which al-Ghazali and Miskawayh found themselves in influenced their reconstruction of Hellenistic virtues. Moderation, or *sophrosune* in the Greek, indicates a virtue that represents a sense of "...all-round moderation, self-control, and prudence in [one's] actions."<sup>58</sup> The classical Islamic thinkers adopted the Arabic term *'iffah* to represent this particular virtue, which "...connotes, among other things, an all-round self-restraint and purity."<sup>59</sup> For Aristotle, this virtue related an individual's ability to control one's physical appetites, such as hunger, thirst and sex drive.<sup>60</sup> Miskawayh's view of this specific virtue follows suit to Aristotle's original rendition, which includes the knowledge of one's self and avoiding all forms of excess.<sup>61</sup> Al-Ghazali extends this virtue into the realm of the religious, claiming that the moderate person refrains from things that are forbidden by religious law as well as anything

else that does not aim to contribute to one's goal: the *happiness of the soul*.<sup>62</sup>

The Greek word for the greatness of soul was *megalopsychia* (great soul), but there is no word that easily translates in the Arabic language. As Sophia Vasalou describes the Aristotelian understanding of this virtue, it connotes "...the person of great moral character who, knowing his greatness, knows the recognition it entitles him to receive from others. Greatness of soul is thus principally concerned with honor."<sup>63</sup> This virtue involves, for Aristotle, a sense of intolerance for insults, as well as an indifference to fortune.<sup>64</sup> Vasalou relates the Greek concept of *megalopsychia* to Seneca's declaration: "I am too great, was born to too great a destiny to be my body's slave."<sup>65</sup> Thus, it is understood primarily in a spiritual sense, understanding one's worth to be associated with their characteristics with which they have adorned themselves. However, the Islamic world had a different set of values than the Greeks, with much less of an emphasis on one's pride, thus the philosophers of Islam also had a more nuanced relationship with this Aristotelian virtue. The Islamic thinkers typically used the translation *kabir al-nafs* (big soul), to refer to this characteristic, but sometimes used others, like *'izam al-himma* (greatness of spirit).

Miskawayh discusses this virtue briefly in the *Refinement of Character*, where he describes *kabir al-nafs*, again in a very Aristotelian manner, as "the disdain for what is insignificant and the capacity to bear honor and dishonor."<sup>66</sup> He describes *'izam al-himme* as the virtue

58 M. Ashraf Adeel, "Moderation in Greek and Islamic Tradition, and a Virtue Ethics of the Qur'an," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 32 no. 3 (2015): 8.

59 Adeel, "Moderation in Greek and Islamic Tradition, and a Virtue Ethics of the Qur'an," 8.

60 Adeel, 11.

61 Adeel, 13.

62 Adeel, 14.

63 Sophia Vasalou, "An Ancient Virtue and Its Heirs: The Reception of Greatness of Soul in the Arabic Tradition", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 45, no. 4 (2017): 691.

64 Vasalou, "An Ancient Virtue and Its Heirs," 691.

65 Vasalou, 692.

66 Vasalou, 696.

with which one endures both good and bad fortune throughout life and bears the burdens associated with the process of death.<sup>67</sup> For Miskawayh, in slight difference to the Greek thinkers, the great souled person need not have his excellences known to others, implying that humility is an important part of this virtue. However, Miskawayh suggests that nevertheless "...virtues 'shine like the sun' and in practice rarely remain undiscovered."<sup>68</sup> Again differing from the Greeks, Miskawayh suggests that "[i]t befits one who knows his soul to know the multiplicity of flaws and deficiencies that beset it."<sup>69</sup> In this sense, there is never a sense of complete self-satisfaction and a deep-rooted sense of humility along what inevitably is an infinitely enduring journey of self-realization as perfection lies far out of one's reach.<sup>70</sup>

In al-Ghazali's *Scale of Action*, the virtue of *kabir al-nafs* is mentioned in addition to its vice, *sighar al-nafs* (small soul).<sup>71</sup> He describes the virtue as being able to judge one's self worthy of grand things while remaining completely detached about receiving them or their honors.<sup>72</sup> Once again grounding his philosophical mode of operation within the context of the Islamic revelation, Ghazali paints a picture in which, along the lines of acquiring within one's own character the attributes of God's names, it becomes clear that "[t]he person who has gained insight into one of the attributes of God is struck by its grandeur and splendour in a way that fills him with 'a longing for that attribute, an ardor for that grandeur and beauty, and a desire to be adorned

by that feature."<sup>73</sup> What is interesting in the case of al-Ghazali's exposition is that the smallness of soul, or humility, is seen as a vice, but the virtue still relieves itself of the pride that might be attributed to the Greek rendition, by ascribing the grandeur of one's character to God, who is its real giver.<sup>74</sup> Vasalou describes this limited pride by saying that "...once we appreciate our dependence on God, in fact, we will realize that the right attitude to any perfections we happen to possess is not one of joyful confidence but of fear and trembling—a fearful perception of the fragility of our virtue. For what was given to us without reason can be equally easily taken away without reason."<sup>75</sup>

## Similarities and Differences Between Miskawayh and al-Ghazali

As it has been made clear throughout the discourse so far, the virtue ethics of Miskawayh and al-Ghazali are both very similar and very different altogether. There is a nuanced relationship between these two thinkers. One of these topics that are significantly different is their individual relationships with the idea of community. In the first chapter of the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes the process of the acquisition of virtues dependent on one's interactions with others.<sup>76</sup> He likewise describes the environment of one's community as important for the acquisition of virtues within a population.<sup>77</sup> Miskawayh heavily reflects this in his *Refinement of Character*. Vasalou describes his work as essentially saying that "...human beings are not self-sufficient, so they are forced to live

67 Vasalou, 697.

68 Vasalou, 701.

69 Vasalou, 702.

70 Vasalou, 703.

71 Vasalou, 699.

72 Vasalou, 699.

73 Vasalou, 704-5.

74 Vasalou, 705, 714.

75 Vasalou, 715.

76 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapter 1.

77 Aristotle, Book II, Chapter 1.

in communities in order to meet these needs.<sup>78</sup> Miskawayh describes that the virtues exist because of and for our interactions with other human beings.<sup>79</sup> He depicts communities endowed with virtue as being able to "...attain all the desirable things and will not fail to secure the objects of their search, even though these objects may be hard and difficult."<sup>80</sup> Thus, for Miskawayh, community is absolutely necessary for the development of human character, noting "...the need which people have for one another...", and the need for these communities to be endowed with virtue themselves and for them to work in harmony.<sup>81</sup> In contrast, the relationship with society that is present in al-Ghazali's work is very unique and interesting compared to Miskawayh and indeed most philosophers in the field of virtue ethics. Vasalou describes that in "...the *Revival*, the human community appears to recede into the background as a location in which virtue is acquired and practiced. Human society in fact often registers as a source of grave moral danger rather than improvement and edification."<sup>82</sup> Al-Ghazali's warning of the potentially distracting nature of society coupled with his attribution of asceticism as a mystic virtue are reflected in his actual life, much of which as we know, was spent in seclusion with a small band of other Sufi mystics who dedicated themselves to the contemplation of God. The Qur'an builds an idea of the *Umma*, a sense of community based not on kinship or geography but of belief in Islam. Surah 2:143 describes this *Umma* even as a

"moderate community", stating: "We made you a moderate [Umma] (community), so that you should be witnesses over the people...".<sup>83</sup> The laws that apply to this community, the *shari'a*, is seen by al-Ghazali as that which instills virtue in the hearts of the believers.<sup>84</sup> By following the law, one improves their actions, and when one improves their actions, they improve their character.<sup>85</sup> For al-Ghazali, *shari'a* is not something that exists as a guide for mere actions, but as an instrument for the transformation of one's being.<sup>86</sup> It is in this sense that Sophia Vasalou describes al-Ghazali's virtue ethics as "virtue legalism", as his works form "a distinctive theological approach to the virtues."<sup>87</sup>

One of the aspects that can be explored in this manner is *zakat* which al-Ghazali describes as a *fard 'ayn*, which means that it is a religious *obligation*.<sup>88</sup> *Zakat*, one of the five "pillars" of Islam, which implores a predetermined amount of alms-giving onto the able believer, "...may be considered to be an Islamic institution directly related to social justice."<sup>89</sup> Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of this institution by its inner importance as an act of love for God, as detachment from one's property as well as an act of gratitude for God's blessings.<sup>90</sup> He even states that the payment and distribution of *zakat* should be limited to one's own town to help with the economic retribution and betterment of the poor in the community.<sup>91</sup> These points suggest that *zakat*, as Sabri Orman

83 Qur'an 2:143.

84 Vasalou, "Virtue and the Law in al-Ghazali's Ethics," 304.

85 Vasalou, 297.

86 Vasalou, 300.

87 Vasalou, 293, 289.

88 Sabri Orman, "Al-Ghazali on Justice and Social Justice," *Türkiye İslam İktisadi Dergisi* 5 no. 2 (2018): 41.

89 Orman, "Al-Ghazali on Justice and Social Justice," 48.

90 Al-Ghazali, *The Mysteries of Almsgiving*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris (Lahore, Pakistan: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1980), 25-30.

91 Al-Ghazali, *The Mysteries of Almsgiving*, 23.

78 Sophia Vasalou, "Virtue and the Law in al-Ghazali's

Ethics," in *Islamic Ethics as Educational Discourse: Thought and Impace of the Classical Muslim Thinker*

*Miskawayh*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Yassir El Jamouhi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 314.

79 Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, 149.

80 Ibn Miskawayh, 118.

81 Ibn Miskawayh, 123.

82 Vasalou, "Virtue and the Law in al-Ghazali's Ethics," 315.

suggests, is a redistribution of resources in a state environment.<sup>92</sup> The teachings of Islam, as well as the doctrine of virtue as is described by the Greeks and Miskawayh, seem to require the existence of a community in order to become virtuous. Nevertheless, it also seems that Ghazali recognizes this, but seems to prefer, or station, asceticism above this need, placing God at the center of every one of his deliberations and thus builds a complicated and nuanced relationship between himself and society as a whole.

## Conclusion

It can be said then, with what we have explored, that al-Ghazali's ethical work represents a more inventive style than his predecessor Miskawayh. Miskawayh appears to us as a protagonist in the history of virtue theory, by rewriting the fundamental philosophy of the Greeks in a manner inspired by the Revelation of Muhammad, and reinvigorating the discourse around this cosmological worldview. Al-Ghazali, on the other hand, appears to us as a full reworking of the fundamental tenets of virtue theory within the context of the deepest doctrinal teachings of the Qur'an. He rests on revelation and Divine law as a means of the transformation of character in a manner that resembles the virtue theory that the Greeks invented, but from the scope of the revelatory theological worldview that is presented in the Qur'an. By analyzing the works of these two authors, we can obtain glimpses into the manner in which virtue theory was picked up once again and, having then been resuscitated, finding a new life within the context of the society of the "Islamic Golden Age." It is my hope that by studying and understanding the processes

92 Orman, "Al-Ghazali on Justice and Social Justice,"

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through which virtue theory was transmitted by the classical Islamic thinkers into their own context, we can gain insight into how we can now transmit them and likewise reinvent them in a way that best suits our rapidly changing and globalizing contemporary world.

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# **Interview with Alex Cooper-Williams**

Editor-in-Chief of *Footnote Journal*

**History Collective:** To start off, would you like to tell us about your journal, Footnote, and the role you play in it?

**Alex Cooper-Williams:** *Footnote Journal is an academic historical journal run by students at The University of Queensland in Brisbane (Meanjin), Australia. The journal aims to discuss and build awareness of the past, focusing on untold histories and showcasing the exciting work of early career historians. I am the 2024 Editor-in-Chief of Footnote and am looking to restart and reform the journal following its dormancy since 2021!*

**HC:** You've mentioned that you're currently in the process of reviving the Footnote. What led you to take on this initiative, and what are your plans for its revival?

**Alex:** *I've been vaguely aware of Footnote since its founding but it wasn't until 2023 that I realised how invaluable a space for young students to publish really is. Whether they just want to dip their toes into academia or they're set on pursuing a PhD, Footnote is a space to explore history and publish the passion projects of students who might otherwise let their essays sit dormant on their computers.*

**HC:** You reached out to our journal, History Collective. What motivated you to choose our journal specifically for collaboration?

**Alex:** *I stumbled across History Collective last year on Instagram and after reading a few of the articles on your website, I knew that our visions were closely aligned. Reaching out seemed like the obvious thing to do after that and I am so*

*glad I did.*

**HC:** How does the Footnote distinguish itself from other student journals that focus on history?

**Alex:** *Footnote is (almost) one of a kind over here in Australia, there are very few student journals across the country and even fewer with a focus on history itself. We hope to distinguish ourselves by creating a safe environment for students to express their passion for history.*

**HC:** How can students contribute to or become involved with the Footnote?

**Alex:** *Students can contribute by submitting whatever work they're proud of! We publish our editions in line with our academic semesters (which run from February-November here) and are always on the lookout for essays, you don't even have to be a student at The University of Queensland or studying history explicitly! And for those looking to get involved, just reach out to our team and we'll see what we can do!*

**HC:** What types of work can students submit, and what is the submission process like?

**Alex:** *Students can submit academic essays, articles, interviews, reviews, and more! As long as it's not fiction, we're not too fussed. We try to keep the process as transparent as possible! Because the journal is run by students, we know how scary submitting your work is and try to make that process as easy as possible. Submissions for our next edition close June 1st, and we try to work as closely with accepted submissions as possible to make sure the authors are just as happy with their work as our team is.*



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