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Barna Szamosi

Intersectional contributions to critical race theory concerning health inequality

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Abstract

Racial discrimination in the healthcare system of the United States is the product of the long nineteen century and present discriminatory institutional practices are indebted to the existing racially stratified society and its mechanisms. The intention of critical race theorists is to shed light on the historical embeddedness of racism, and by retaining the category of race as a cultural construct; they locate and challenge racial discrimination. Perhaps one of the main benefits of critical race theory is its history orientation, researchers are capable of pointing out the discursively produced nature of racism, however, it has a single category focus, and thus, intersectional theory can prove to be a positive tool that is sufficiently sensitive to address discrimination resulting from multiple sources of oppression. In this paper, some of the healthcare related benefits of the combination of these approaches will be discussed.

Keywords: critical race theory, intersectionality, racism, health inequality

Introduction

Contemporary racial discrimination in the healthcare system of the United States is the product of the long nineteenth century and present, discriminatory institutional practices are rooted in the racially stratified society – understood as a cultural, historical construct – and its mechanisms. The intention of critical race theorists is to shed light on the historical embeddedness of racism and by retaining the category of race as a construction; they locate and challenge racial discrimination. Perhaps one of the main benefits of critical race theory is its history orientation, researchers are capable of pointing out the discursively produced nature of racism, however it has a single category focus, and thus, intersectional theory can prove to be a positive tool that is sufficiently sensitive to address discrimination resulting from multiple sources of oppression. In this paper, some of the healthcare related benefits of the combination of these approaches will be discussed.

In the first part of the paper, the historical roots of critical race theory is explained because it is necessary to understand where the contemporary understanding and sensitivity towards racial categorization is stemming from. The main goal of critical race theorists is to address the complexities of racial discrimination. The aim is not to discard race, but to offer a re-conceptualized vision about how to discuss race based discrimination and propose mechanisms that can minimize and even eradicate these practices. Critical race theorists concern themselves with institutional racist practices, starting out from the legal discourse; they address the everyday experiences of non-white citizens suffering from discrimination. Central problems that critical race theorists address are related to

colorblindness, marginalization, and thus, the integration of the experiences of people of color into the political-legal discourse, thus producing racially equal institutional systems and a just society.

Intersectional contributions are useful because they enable researchers to address multiple forces of oppression. Black feminist scholars, who realized that their problems differ from the problems articulated by white middle-class women, conceptualized intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological framework. Intersectional scholars contend that social categories can act as labels, and individuals whose subjectivities are configured at the intersections of multiple categories experience a qualitatively different form of oppression than those women's experience whose oppression is the result of their sex. The application of these insights are valuable in the healthcare discourse, because with this approach researchers can address how health related discrimination occurs at different identity configurations.

Foundations, key tenets, and main areas of intervention

In the United States during the 1960s the civil rights movement arrived at a plateau, it was perceived by scholars and activists alike that the proposed racial reforms were not working and were not properly implemented to change institutional practice and give equal opportunity and equal results for every racial stratum of the society. A movement called critical race theory developed as a response of these problems. It started to emerge in the 1970s with the works of the legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. They were interested in developing a critical legal discourse that could address the complexities of racism; one that could take into account the everyday experiences of non-white Americans who suffer from the injustices of various institutions.[1] Civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, or Malcom X inspired critical race theorists early on, and, parallel to the effects of political activism, they were also influenced by the works of critical legal theorists, feminists, and continental social and political philosophers.

Critical race theorists build their work on five basic tenets that concern racism, material determinism, conceptualization of race, racialization, and the thesis of unique voice of color.[2] The most important starting point in their works is the thesis that racism is ordinary, by this they mean that racism is so engrained into the everyday practices of social

[1] Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, "Introduction," In *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), xvi.

[2] Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 6–8.

life that it is hard to recognize every form of it especially if one tries to approach equality from a color-blind perspective. Addressing color-blindness means in this case that they try to move beyond formal conceptualizations of equality and integrate racialized experiences to point out what are the problems with neutrality in educational, legal, or a healthcare environment. The second feature is material determinism or 'interest convergence' – to use the concept of Derrick Bell. This states that racism works to advance the economic state of white elites, and it also advances the situation of the working class whose majority belongs to the white strata therefore they are interested in keeping the status quo unless their political and material interest dictates otherwise (Bell provides an example in the case of Brown v. Board of Education[3]). Another central theme in critical race theory is how to understand the concept of race. Although the movement places emphasis on materialism and the materialist consequences of racism, it would be a misunderstanding of the movement to view the term from a classical philosophical-realist perspective. Critical race theory builds on sociological, historical, philosophical, and linguistic scholarship that understands race from a social constructivist position.[4] By this critical race theorists mean that race and racial classification are social products, it is not possible to find biological structures that are objective equivalents of racial categories. Social discourses produce races and these categories are contextually, that is, historically and culturally varied. Certainly, critics do not argue that race is fluid in the sense that there is no possibility of finding biological similarities that make it possible to group people together; they rather want to take issue with a very problematic understanding of social constructivism. In this understanding, there is no materiality to race, but this group of critical race theorists argues that there are real, material consequences of race – albeit these are operationalized differently in various social contexts – that we need to confront in our societies. People attach different stereotypical traits to the hierarchically understood racial types that fuels various forms of racial discrimination across all aspects of social life. The last tenet is when someone works from the framework of critical race theory to give voice to the subordinated, racially silenced people. This is what critics term, voice-of-color thesis[5]; and by contrast to an essentialist understanding they do not mean that people of color have a biologically unique voice that one can identify with that particular racial group, but

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[3] Delgado, and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory,* 18–20.

[4] Delgado, and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory,* 7–8; Michael W. Byrd, and Linda A. Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey.," *Journal of the National Medical Association* vol. 93, no. 3 (2001): 11S-34S; Ian Haney López, "Race and Colorblindness after Hernandez and Brown," *Chicano-Latino Law Review* vol. 25 (2005): 61–76; Ian Haney López, "Is the Post in Post-Racial the Blind in Colorblind?," *Cardozo Law Review* vol. 32 (2010): 807–31.

[5] Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory,* 9.

this draws on their unique experiences as a racialized group. Because of their racialized ways of lives, members of these communities have access to perspectives, which are not available to people who belong to the privileged racial group. The thesis entails that these people of color are capable of authentically describing race and racism thus critical theorists seek to integrate their narratives into their institutional critiques, or when it is not possible to include their voices, to point out how, why, and where institutional practices omit their perspectives. They claim that without the views of the non-white population on institutional racism it is not possible to attain a racially just society.

Contemporary scholarship deals with issues of color-blindness that goes back to the era of the civil rights movement when Martin Luther King called for a social practice that would judge people based on their actions and not based on their skin color. A related issue today is to develop a language that deals with racial identity and how other social categories intersect with racialized micro-level experience. A similarly important theme is addressing how globalization affects the economic circumstances of domestic minorities and their Third World counterparts. Critical race theorists argue that the exploitation of both groups by the elite is an interconnected issue thus it should be addressed simultaneously. Another important development in the field is that is has been open to feminist, queer, Latino/a issues and scholars successfully established these critical subdisciplines. With the insights of critical race theory scholars can address issues related to the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and racial discrimination that directed towards people of color of non-African-American descent.[6] As critical race theory expands into other disciplines it remains an important force that can direct social transformation.

Critical race theory concerning health inequality

In a society where different forms of racial oppression are still normal, critical race theorists find it important to bring to the forefront of social discussions the embedded racialized practices of different institutions. Medicine is no exception to that. In a society, such as the United States, where the health standards of African Americans are significantly lower than members of the white racial group, scholars from various disciplines seek to address the structural barriers to race equality in health care. One of the most important steps that helps scholars, medical professionals, and everyday medical interactions is to acknowledge the historical roots of racial medical practice in any cultural context. One such example of the contemporary significance of this issue is the protest against the statue of J. Marion Sims, who was a gynecologist in the nineteenth century and he has statues in

[6] Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*.

several places in the United States.[7] Sims pioneered surgery for fistula, gallbladder problems, and also, he was the first gynecologist who performed the first successful artificial insemination. The problem with Sims, and his scientific feats, is the path that he took in order to develop successful methods to cure women. He practiced medicine in Alabama between 1835 and 1849 where it was possible for him to experiment with slaves, and thus his medical practice raises important ethical issues. He performed surgeries without the consent of slave women, and because at the time anesthesia was only recently discovered it was not normally used during surgeries thus Sims operated on slave women without painkillers. He held the belief that black women do not feel any pain. In a contemporary analysis, Carolyn Moxley Rouse in her work on health care treatment of African American patients with sickle cell disease points out the long-lasting effect of this racial stereotype.[8] Rouse discusses the culturally constructed nature of suffering regarding the racialized patient. "Culturally accepted notions of who is a victim, and who suffers are not stable across time. Conceptualizations of suffering are dependent on notions of causation, accountability, innocence, agency, rationality, and selfhood, all of which change relative to the age, race, wealth, gender, and assumed intelligence of the sufferer."[9] Sickle-cell anemia is a medical condition that describes the shape of the blood cells that basically block the capillaries thus obstructing blood flow and consequently withholding oxygen from bodily organs. This process causes immense pain on the one hand and irreversible organ damage on the other hand. Thus, it is crucial to treat the pain of the patient as quickly and efficiently as possible. Despite the protocols accepted by the physicians and hematologists working with SCD patients, Rouse points out how health professionals' understanding of pain differs from each other's understanding, and also from the actual experiences of African-American patients; thus, their treatment practices vary as well.[10] But it is not only the physical inaccessibility of the feeling that patients experience, it is also the vocabulary that patients and healthcare workers use that makes treatment racialized. In a story related to a patient called Max, Rouse explains that the description Max gave about his experience was simply incomprehensible to the medical staff. Max used cultural signifiers in his interactions which were meaningless for his caregivers, who instead of putting effort into precise cultural translation substituted his words with racist, classist, and gendered tropes.[11]

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[7] DeNeen L. Brown, "A Surgeon Experimented on Slave Women without Anesthesia. Now His Statues Are under Attack.," *The Washington Post,* 2017.

[8] Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Uncertain Suffering: Racial Health Care Disparities and Sickle Cell Disease* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).

[9] Rouse, *Uncertain Suffering*, 124.

[10] Rouse, *Uncertain Suffering*, 24–25.

[11] Rouse, *Uncertain Suffering,* 40.

In the case that Rouse describes she notes that she does not want to place emphasis on racism or on the racist practices of medical professionals in her account, rather she wants to describe the hidden dimensions of institutionalized racism in the medical sphere. Her aim is to show how racist beliefs are acted out unconsciously by medical staff thereby perpetuating racial inequality in their profession. If the aim is to treat patients equally it is mandatory to bring practices of racialization to the foreground by for example, integrating the experiences of individuals such as Max into critical understandings of healthcare. Critical race studies in the field of history of medicine such as the works of W. Michael Byrd and Linda A. Clayton, both of whom are health policy researchers and trained physicians, are crucial contributions to the field that aims at reconfiguring healthcare.[12] In their work, they explore the history of medical treatments that African American's have received since the foundation of American colonies. They claim that the institution of slavery laid down the groundwork for a dual health system that persists until the present. Byrd and Clayton start out their analysis from reviewing the works Western medical professionals from ancient times. Fundamentally, they argue that color based classification of races existed in some preliminary form as a result of the works of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle who assigned inferior status to slaves indifferent of their racial ancestry. Later the works of the Roman physician Galen and the Moslem Avicenna also contributed to the ideology of racial hierarchy by teaching that blacks are physically and psychologically inferior types.[13] Medieval monks accepted and relied on the teachings of ancient philosophers and physicians. And by the time of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Western physicians developed and widely accepted the thesis of 'separate and unequal creations' – which is attributed to the Swiss physician, Paracelcus, – that was later used to justify racial separation and subordination of peoples who are different from whites.[14] Thus, the hierarchical understanding of races was a historically embedded ideology by the time of the Enlightenment when philosophers and naturalists tried to use reason to explore, classify, give explanation as to how and why things work the way they do in our human centered universe. In this endeavor the classification of races was a central concern for many naturalists. For example, Carl Linnaeus, who is considered to be the father of biological classification, Johann Blumenbach, George Leclerc de Buffon, and George Cuvier all contributed to Western European imperialism by providing pseudo-scientific

[12] Michael W. Byrd and Linda A. Clayton, *The Medical History of African Americans and the Problem of Race: Beginnings to 1900* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000); Michael W. Byrd and Linda A. Clayton, *An American Health Dilemma: Race, Medicine, and Healthcare in the United States, 1900-2000* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

[13] Byrd and Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," 17.

[14] Byrd and Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," 17.

justification for the subordination of non-white people across the globe.[15] The knowledge that these naturalists produced was used to strengthen stereotypes such as the idea that poor health of black people is normal, they are biologically weaker in comparison to whites. Byrd and Clayton argue that the difference between the health standards of white and non-white Americans thus is a product of racialization and racism that was present in the American discourse since its beginning, but importantly, they claim that it has lasting effects in the twenty-first century.

Byrd and Clayton underscore that the basic infrastructure of the health delivery system of the United States was ready by 1920 and it has changed little regarding its accessibility by marginalized citizens.[16] It was developed into a racially segregated institution that is very inaccessible for people from lower socioeconomic classes. Unfortunately, the authors claim, this has changed little during the twentieth century. Instructive examples from the first half of the twentieth century are the eugenics informed efforts to sterilize the socially subversive members of the population. Sterilization laws were enacted in the 1920s by a dozen states and these concerned people who were incarcerated, who were deemed mentally handicapped or mentally ill.[17] Kevles claims that in California alone, more people were sterilized by 1933 than in the other states combined. And he makes an important distinction regarding the class based and racialized nature of the law: those who had private care were not subjected to the process. This also means that poor people, African Americans, and other minorities were much more often subjected to sterilization than Anglo-Saxon whites were. Another example for institutional racism by misusing medical power in the recent history of American public health that affected African Americans is the Tuskegee syphilis study that was conducted between 1932 and 1972.[18] In this experiment, African American patients with late-stage syphilis were deceived by the staff members of the Public Health Service who basically observed the progress of the disease by pretending to give free health care to those who took part in the clinical study. The time-span, its scale, and its institutionally organized nature makes the Tuskegee study still a prominent example of contemporary racism and makes understandable the distrust of African Americans towards the U.S. medical apparatus. The situation started to change in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was enacted.[19] With the hospital desegregation

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[15] Byrd and Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," 18.

[16] Byrd and Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," 20.

[17] Daniel J. Kevles, "Eugenics and Human Rights," *The British Medical Journal* vol. 319, no. 7207 (1999): 436.

[18] Susan M. Reverby, ""Special Treatment ": Bidil, Tuskegee, and the Logic of Race," *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* vol. 36, no. 3 (2008): 478.

[19] Byrd and Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," 21.

ruling and the start of the health center movement the health of African Americans has gradually improved. Michael Byrd and Linda Clayton write that they had more access to healthcare because of the reforms, and efforts were made to improve minority access to medical education – though these latter efforts were very symbolic instances. They further claim, that the positive change that started in 1964 had stopped by the end of the 1970s and the health status of African Americans has deteriorated since that time. Byrd and Clayton claim: "until persistent institutional racism and racial discrimination in health policy, medical and health professions education, and health delivery are eradicated – all of which play significant roles in access, availability, and quality of care – African Americans will continue to experience poor health status and outcomes."[20] Without systematic transformations, it is not possible to reach an egalitarian healthcare system that can work according to a new non-racializing paradigm.

In the 1990s with the launch of the Human Genome project it seemed that geneticists will provide scientific knowledge for the world within the scope of ten years that settles the doubts that has still surround that the idea of race and racial difference. But instead of accomplishing this goal racial science takes new shape through genetic studies. Dorothy Roberts claims, this is mainly because of two scientific developments: scientists wanted to abandon race and suggested a focus on statistical genomic similarities and an alternative to this was the suggestion that geographic ancestry be used as a substitute that leaves behind the discriminative baggage of the concept.[21] With this move scientists basically re-dressed the concept in genetic terms. Roberts argues that race persists because it is politically useful, thus she emphasizes that "racial science and politics are inseparable."[22] Because of these interconnections, Roberts finds it important to analyze the political function of race in its context and provide a thorough critique that justifies its rejection from the scientific discourse.

Not only the history of eugenics but a contemporary focus on race/ethnicity necessitates the use of a critical framework that allows for the mapping of continuities in terms of racialization among different historical periods. Critical race theory can help the analysis by shedding light on the historical embeddedness of racial structures in Central European societies and how it is represented in medical discussions. The contemporary racial/ethnic focus of medicine is rooted in the discussions of the socialist period, while some of the arguments present in the socialist discourse can be traced back to the early eugenic concerns of the twentieth century.

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[20] Byrd and Clayton, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," 25.

[21] Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-Create Race in the Twenty-First Century* (New York and London: The New Press, 2011), 57.

[22] Roberts, *Fatal Invention*, 79.

Intersectional contributions to critical race studies on public health

Intersectionality, defined as "analytic sensibility", became a widely deployed theoretical and methodological tool in feminist studies since its inception at the end of the 1980s.[23] In an earlier work she articulates the definition in a more detailed manner: intersectionality addresses the multiple dimensions of social relations and their relevance to possible subjectivities that can be formed within the social worlds.[24] This new approach was developed to shed light on the complex nature of discrimination that women experience depending on their class, race and gender. Feminist researchers are working with the concept in political science,[25] in philosophy,[26] in sociology,[27] and in public health as well.[28] In the following pages, some of the contemporary directions suggested by feminist scholars will be discussed, with a focus on public health.

The first critical works that pointed towards the direction of intersectional theorizing appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These were works of black feminist scholars and

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[23] Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 38, no. 4 (2013): 795.

[24] Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771–1800.

[25] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* vol. 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99; bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics, Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000); Gloria Wekker, "Still Crazy after All Those Years... Feminism for the New Millennium," *European Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 11, no. 4 (2004): 487–500; Ange Marie Hancock, "When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a *Research Paradigm,*" Perspectives on Politics vol. 5, no. 1 (2007): 63–79; Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, "Ain't I a Woman ? Revisiting Intersectionality," *Journal of International Women's Studies* vol. 5, no. 3 (2004): 75–86; Myra Marx Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[26] Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is Strong Objectivity?," in *Feminist Epistemologies,* ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 49–82; Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," Signs vol. 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31; Iris van der Tuin, "'Jumping Generations': On Second- and Third-Wave Feminist Epistemology," *Australian Feminist Studies* vol. 24, no. 59 (2009): 17–31.

[27] Leslie Mccall, *Complex Inequality: Gender, Class, and Race in the New Economy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001); Mccall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality"; Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2011).

[28] Lisa Bowleg, "The Problem With the Phrase Women and Minorities: Intersectionality — an Important Theoretical Framework for Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* vol. 102, no. 7 (2012): 1267–74; Olena Hankivsky, "Women's Health, Men's Health, and Gender and Health: Implications of Intersectionality," *Social Science & Medicine* vol. 74, no. 11 (2012): 1712–20.

activists whose aim was to call attention to the inherent inequalities within identity politics and to shed light on the deterministic/marginalizing nature of social categories that rather act as labels for those who are identified as others. In 1977 within the black liberationist movement feminists published a statement about the different experiences of black women, which can be read as an early work towards intersectional thinking. In their work, titled The Combahee River Collective Statement, they argued that different kinds of oppressions construct their living conditions in the United States. They emphasized that their main aim was to "struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression."[29] In a similar manner, bell hooks stated[30], that black women experience discrimination differently from white women, and therefore traditional identity politics is not solving their problems. These examples from early intersectionally-tuned works were calling theorists to develop new perspectives to fight multiple-discrimination. Intersectionality, developed in view of with these problems, seemed to be a promising, sensitive, and open new framework.

It was the legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw's article in which she first proposed the use of the term to address multiple discrimination of black women in court cases.[31] In her work, she argues that the problem with traditional anti-discrimination movement and identity politics is that they are addressing only one axis of oppression that is either race or gender, when in fact oppression works on bodies from multiple directions. In her later work, developing the concept further, she proposed three different aspects for intersectional research, namely structural, political, and representational intersectionality.[32] In this paper, she argues for a more precise approach that can correct the problems of identity politics.[33] She says, that the problem with identity politics is not the often-mentioned idea that it fails to transcend difference, but its inherent force that identity categories homogenize groups and thus intra-group differences are silenced. In her essay, she starts out from structural problems such as racism and sexism and claims that these analytically and conceptually different discriminatory forces are readily intersect in the lives of ordinary people. Through legal cases, Crenshaw pointed out that battering and rape affect women of color differently. In this work, one of the most important contributions of Crenshaw was to underscore in these

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[29] Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in *Home Girls. A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New Brunswic, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000 [1977]), 264.

[30] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

[31] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* vol. 101, no. 7 (1988): 1331–87.

[32] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color."

[33] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1242.

empirical cases that the boundaries of identity constructs are not neatly distinguishable from each other thus an intersectional analysis demands a careful look at various crossroads of subjective experiences where individuals try to negotiate their subject positions to avoid economic or political marginalization, stigmatization, or any other type of discrimination. By adopting an intersectional lens, social scientists are in a better position to address inequalities because they can rely on a multidimensional method that can handle the dynamics between multiple identities.

An intersectional perspective in analyzing the production of oppressed, marginalized, and silenced subject positions allow for considering multiple dimensions of identities, so that it enables us to view subject positions as configurations of discursive power relations. In other words, by looking at the locational, that is individual or group level interactions, and interpreting the lived experience of subjects in relation to greater structural inequalities, an intersectional approach allows the incorporation of infinite variables (social categories) into its sociological investigation. The openness of intersectionality can be viewed both as its strength and its weakness and the stances researchers take in applauding or rejecting its usefulness sometimes hark back to this characteristic.[34]

In the initial stages of the discipline, intersectional studies addressed different forms of aggravated discrimination that were based on sex, sexuality, language, political opinion, religion, social origin etc. As is evident from recent studies cited above, that although intersectionality is a recent sociological development to study complex discriminatory mechanisms, it is notable that struggles for political recognition in the women's movement around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries implied the identity category of class and gender. Women's everyday experiences were articulated from different social economic positions thus class positions led to the division of women because priorities were different and those in power, particularly middle-class women, silenced the voices of those who were economically marginalized.[35] This example is only one instance to suggest that the problem, that intersectional scholars address, namely that social identities like gender are not homogenous categories, but with the interaction of other social identities such as class and race, they create qualitatively different subjectivities.

In most feminist studies race, gender, and class are treated with equal importance; they are understood to be mutually constituting and reinforcing each other. Angéla Kóczé and

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[34] Kathy Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful," *Feminist Theory* vol. 9, no. 1 (2008): 67–85; Evelien Geerts and Iris Van der Tuin, "From Intersectionality to Interference: Feminist onto-Epistemological Reflections on the Politics of Representation," *Women's Studies International Forum* vol. 41 (2013): 171–78.

[35] Angéla Kóczé, "Missing Intersectionality: Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe" (Budapest: Center for Policy Studies, CEU, 2009), 18.

Raluca Maria Popa emphasize that it is necessary in Central Eastern Europe to accept that only with the recognition of class as a crucial element of inequality thus a vital element of social analysis, will we get sufficient understanding of racialized differences.[36] We must recognize that class plays a key role in the dynamics of marginalization along with race and gender. Drawing on the works of intersectional scholars, Enikő Magyari-Vincze underscores that studies can focus on structural problems, namely how race, class, and gender work on the structural level and provide frames or limitations for subjectivities at the crossroads of power vectors.[37] Patricia Hill Collins who is a sociologist, termed these structural forces as matrix of domination.[38] By this expression she means that oppression operates in four domains and can be visualized as a complex web of forces. These four interrelated domains are the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains. Regarding this problem, Hill Collins says that "the structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues."[39]

Although intersectional perspectives are applied in various social science disciplines it is not true of studies that are within the broad field of public health. It is a new methodological framework as discussed above: it only started to become integrated into social science disciplines in the 1990s, and it is a tool that researchers have used only recently to address public health inequalities. Lisa Bowleg, a social psychologist, argues that intersectionality is beneficial for public health studies because it can be integrated with health equality goals.[40] Intersectional studies are about social inequalities, their aims are exploring and exposing invisible obstructions to equal treatment and opportunity, thus as a perspective, it is compatible with critical works that address public health issues with the aim of leveling health standards among different social groups. According to Bowleg one of the main benefits of the perspective is its compatibility with a recent direction in public health that also places emphasis on "social determinants of health, or eco-social determinants, or social inequality" in this new approach an "ever-growing chorus of public health scholars have advocated for a greater focus on how social-structural factors beyond the level of the individual influence health."[41] Bowleg further asserts that an intersectionally informed research starts out from

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[36] Kóczé, "Missing Intersectionality," 25.

[37] Kóczé, "Missing Intersectionality," 26.

[38] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[39] Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 276.

[40] Bowleg, "The Problem With the Phrase Women and Minorities: Intersectionality — an Important Theoretical Framework for Public Health."

[41] Bowleg, "The Problem With the Phrase Women and Minorities," 1269.

the experiences of historically oppressed communities, thus it can assist the development of well-targeted and cost-effective health promotion campaigns, medical interventions, or public health policies.

One of the most important problems in addition to single-category analyses is when a category is treated with a single focus such as in the case with gender when conflated with the category of women. This is problematic for various reasons. The first is that gender is not synonymous with the category of women, and, it is not a homogenous category, it should be further divided by taking sexuality, class, religion, and race/ethnicity, and other contextually relevant identity categories into account. But another crucial problem is that gender is often used interchangeably with women thus men and their equally diverse groups are left out of the analysis. This also means that their gender specific healthcare needs are not visible.[42] Without the integration of these perspectives it is not possible to move ahead in creating conditions for equal treatment in healthcare.

But as Olena Hankivsky notes, we must also move beyond the binaries such as interest in the health of men and women.[43] The problem with such research designs is that it tries to answer questions which are formulated with a stereotypical gender bias in mind. To take an example, a question such as: do women and men have the same risk of getting cancer is problematic because it re-creates two seemingly homogenous groups based on the sex of the participants when there is evidence that women and men can both share certain genetic mutations that would make them similarly susceptible to cancer. Thus, research questions that focus on for example genetic traits which are linked to cancer are more beneficial for the public health needs of both men and women and would help to create hybrid groups in which sex is only one social category among many others that complicates our understanding of susceptibility.

Intersectionality must not be understood as a prescriptive method. It rather contributes to scientific analyses by opening analytical frames and letting us bring in analytical categories that were – and perhaps still are – incompatible with each other in single dimensional methodological paradigms. It facilitates discussion by pointing out complexities that were previously glossed over because of insensitive methodological lenses. Thus, the most important contribution of intersectionality to critical race studies is that it makes visible elements in the medical discourse that thwart healthcare equality or perhaps even implicitly support discriminative practices in healthcare. Identities such as race/ethnicity, gender, and class work as structuring principles in organizing social hierarchies in the professional

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[42] Hankivsky, "Women's Health , Men's Health, and Gender and Health: Implications of Intersectionality," 1713.

[43] Hankivsky, "Women's Health , Men's Health, and Gender and Health," 1714.

narratives of healthcare workers. Healthcare professionals, perhaps inadvertently, produce medically significant subject positions in their narratives along the lines of said identities, and by doing so, they reproduce distinct groups and fail to stress the shared biological and social characteristics across groups.

Conclusion

Critical race studies as a framework is useful because with its theoretical and methodological tools it is possible to address racial inequality and its historical embeddedness in racially stratified societies. The category of race is understood in the framework as a social construct that has material consequences. In other words, in order to tackle racial inequalities it is important to retain the category of race with the implication that race is the product of local discursive forces that inscribe cultural values into biological differences and thus make racial discrimination possible. Although critical race studies sensitively address issues around the identity category of race, those studies that have a single category focus were criticized, just as feminist single category analyses were criticized regarding their inability to address intragroup differences and overlaps between groups. Intersectional studies with their open approach are capable of addressing oppressive forces that intersect in individual lives, thus, making intersectionality a viable asset for social science researchers interested in exploring racial inequalities in public health.

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Eszter Rakita

A Story of Perspective of Persistence and Diligence: The Life of Victor Gondos, Jr.

Pro&Contra 6

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Abstract:

The article explores the unique career of a second-generation Hungarian-American immigrant, Victor Gondos, Jr. Gondos was born in Budapest in 1902, as a son of a Hungarian teacher-turned American entrepreneur, Victor Gondos, Sr. The family immigrated into the United States in 1911. During his college years, Victor Gondos, Jr. was about to start a military career but, unfortunately, he almost became permanently disabled due to an unexpected illness. After his recovery, he was forced to start an almost completely new life. He had to prevail in a new field as an archivist and military historian that, however, proved to be more successful than he would have ever expected. Victor Gondos, Jr.'s life is a story of resilience, persistence, and bravery, overcoming great obstacles and reaching goals despite many hindering circumstances. His story can also be interpreted as an example of an ambitious immigrant who wants to prove his loyalty to his new home country through actions.

Keywords: immigration, assimilation, Hungarian-American, 20th century, military service, US history, US Army

Introduction

The aim of this study is to present the unique career of a second-generation Hungarian American immigrant. Victor Gondos Jr. was born in Budapest in 1902 and he came to the USA as a young child for the first time. During his college years, he was about to start a military career but, unfortunately, he almost became permanently disabled due to an unexpected illness. After his recovery, he was forced to start an almost completely new life. He had to prevail in a new field that proved to be more successful later than he would have ever expected it. Victor Gondos Jr.'s life is a story of resilience, persistence, and bravery, overcoming great obstacles and reaching goals despite many hindering circumstances. His story can also be interpreted as an example of an ambitious immigrant who wanted to prove his loyalty to his new home country through actions.

In 1911, Victor Gondos Jr. emigrated to the United States as a young child, still school aged, with his family, during the First World War. After finishing high school, in 1922 he almost applied for a training in the Organized Reserve (Officers Reserve Corps) created by the National Defense Act in the same year.[1] In addition, he was studying to

[1] The National Defense Act of 1920 reorganized the armed forces. The three main branches were the regular Army, the National Guard and the Organized Reserve. The latter included the Officers Reserve Corps, into which Victor Gondos Jr. was enrolled.

be an architect at the University of Michigan. Because of his illness, he had to give up his military career soon and look for a new one. In the 1940s, after his graduation as a historian at the University of Pennsylvania, he became a renowned figure of the academic field of military history in America, proving he could serve his chosen country 'not only with a sword but a pen, too'. In this paper, I attempt to explore the main landmarks of his special life path in detail. The most important source of this study are the Gondos Family Papers located in the collection of the Balch Institute of Ethnic Studies in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. From this large amount of archival sources, I, primarily, use a memoir[2] and certain letters of the extensive family correspondence to write Victor Jr.'s, the oldest son of the Gondos family, biography. In addition, I received useful information about his life from the records of the US Senate discussing his veteran pension, and its attachments during my research.[3] The Gondoses had a rich and eventful story full of twists and turns which can be explored thoroughly from the resources. In this paper, although I only focus on the oldest son, Victor Jr.'s life, in some cases, I write about other family members when necessary.

Victor Gondos Jr's career is a unique story in the Hungarian historiography. It is an immigrant success story as well as a story of persistence and diligence. Not many Hungarian immigrant soldiers' careers are well documented in secondary literature. József Zachar, the renowned military historian, wrote an excellent book about Michael Kováts de Fabriczy, one of the "founding fathers" of the U.S. Cavalry during the War of Independence. This paper is part of a wider range of research, aiming to reconstruct the story of the Gondos Family based on an extensive variety of sources, embedded in 20th century American history.

Family Background

The head of the Gondos family, Victor Gondos Sr, was born in Szilágycseh, (Transylvania) 1879. Victor graduated as a civil engineer at the Royal Technological University in Budapest, at the beginning of 1900 and later received a doctorate in political science. He married Irene Trautmann (born in Budapest, 1882) in 1901. The couple had two sons: Victor Jr. (born in Budapest, July 20th, 1902) and Robert (born as Zoltán in Budapest, February 2nd, 1905). The first time the family came in contact with America was in 1904.

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[2] Gondos, Robert Z. *Recollections of My Early Youth 1908–1921.* Manuscript. Ca. 1978. From the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 3082, *Gondos Family Papers, 1895–ca. 1978.*

[3] US Senate Records, Calendar No. 1711, Report No. 1636: *An Act Granting a Pension to Captain Victor Gondos, Junior.* United States Congress, House, Committee on Invalid Pensions. 1940.

Victor Sr. was delegated by the Austro–Hungarian government to St. Louis, Missouri, to study the local agricultural technology and production development. According to the renowned Hungarian historian, Tibor Glant, the Austro-Hungarian Government began a systematic examination of the US industry as early as 1881. Several economists and other governmental commissioners visited the country to study the American economy.[4] The world expo of 1904 in St. Louis itself also sparked a series of studies about American industry.[5] The event attracted many official observers with government commissions from all around the world, including Austria-Hungary. Victor Gondos Sr. was one of these observers. Glant even mentions the Gondos Brothers (Victor Sr, and Alexander who became an infamous journalist in the US) in his book, citing their works and briefly commenting on their activities.[6]

His experiences during this visit had a great impact on Victor Gondos Sr. This experience along with the lack of financial and career opportunities in Hungary made him decide to go back to the United States. In the summer of 1906, at his own request, he was sent again to the US by the Ministry of Commerce. His task, at the time, was to conduct long-term studies of American agricultural inventions and technologies, and to write reports about them to the Ministry. This time his family accompanied him. During this three-year-mission, they lived in Chicago, Illinois.

In this period between 1906 and 1909 the family led an ordinary middle-class life. Victor Sr. worked as an engineer at several companies. They returned to Hungary at the end of 1909. In a last attempt to make it in the old country, Victor Sr. established a couple of different enterprises but all of them failed in a short period of time. Soon the idea of returning to "the land of unbounded opportunities" came to his mind again.[7] Thus, he found a way to receive a commission for another business trip this time from the Royal Hungarian Museum of Commerce.[8] His decision was so adamant that had he not received the commission, they would still have immigrated to the United States permanently because, as he wrote to his father in a letter dated on March 10, 1911, "we are determined

[4] Tibor Glant, *Amerika, a csodák és csalódások földje. Az Amerikai Egyesült Államok képe a hosszú XIX. század magyar utazási irodalmában* (Debrecen: DUP, 2013), 158. [America, the Land of Wonders and Delusions. The Image of the United States of America in the Hungarian Travel Literature of the Long 19th Century.]

[5] Glant 2013, 168.

[6] Glant 2013, 170–171, 195–198, 215.

[7] Gondos, *Recollections*, 21.

[8] Victor Gondos Sr. received a stipend from the Royal Hungarian Museum of Commerce to study the latest technological developments in agricultural machinery in the United States. As a part of his task, he had to comply regular reports to the Ministry of Commerce about his findings.

to permanently settle in America. This ground is not meant for us and this is not what we want to leave to our children as heritage."9 So this time they returned to the US not as sojourners but as immigrants. In July, in the year of 1911, they arrived in New York City where they rented a large apartment in the Bronx. This was the beginning of the family's new life in the United States.

In the huge immigration waves caused by modernization and a rapid economic development after the Civil War, vast numbers of Hungarians began to sail to America in the 1880s. This period lasted until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. During this time, around 2.5 million Hungarians (not only Magyars of course) moved to the US although not necessarily for the purpose of permanently settling down. The immigration wave from the1880s to 1914 also had a peak period. Namely, between 1899 and 1913, according to the American immigration statistics, more than 1.8 million people from Hungary immigrated to the New World.10 This figure is 1.17 million in the official Hungarian statistics.11 This wave was dominated by poor East- and South-European agricultural workers who set out to the "land of opportunities." Their proportion, for instance around the turn of the century, was 77 per cent.12 The Gondoses did not belong in the category of poverty-stricken Hungarian peasantry. They did have, however, characteristics that fit into the patterns of New Immigration: better opportunities and the possibility of personal advancement pulled them to the United States. Their story of immigration and assimilation can provide a unique example of middle-class immigration in the first half of the 20th century, as well as a Hungarian version of "achieving the American Dream."

Figure 1: Family photo from 1908

[9] Gondos, Victor. *Victor Gondos to Mor Gondos, March 10, 1911.* Letter. From the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Gondos Family Papers,* 1895–ca. 1978. Originally written in Hungarian, English translation is mine.

[10] Julianna, Puskás, Ties That Bind, Ties That Divide. 100 Years of Hungarian Experience in the United States (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000.) 21.

[11] Puskás Julianna, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban 1880–1940* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1982.) 445–446. [Hungarian Immigrants in the United States 1880–1940.]

[12] Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 105.

Studies and Military Service

Both children, Victor Jr and Robert started primary school in New York, but the family moved several times. They lived in Bridgeport, CT, Philadelphia and Reading, PA, Dayton and Cleveland, OH, and in Atlantic City, NJ. From 1911, the children attended American schools, learned the English language, and became accustomed to American culture. Regarding his later life, it is not surprising that Victor Jr. had very good school reports, and was interested in military affairs. At the outbreak of the First World War, Victor Jr. was 12 and Robert was 9 years old. Victor Jr. was deeply invested in the events of the war. His brother writes about this period in his memoirs:

Brother Victor, keenly interested in military matters, posted a war map which showed Belgium and France and excitedly followed the progress of Von Kluck's right flank as it swept through Belgium and Northern France and nearly enveloped Paris. We all watched with interest as the pins moved forward falling just short of Paris and, then as they retreated, the stabilized lines of later trench warfare.[13]

Victor Jr. finished high school in Reading, PA in 1920. In September of the same year, after a series of arguments with his father as to which university to choose, he started studying civil engineering and later architecture at the University of Michigan. He graduated in 1925. As he began his university studies, at the same time he enrolled in the basic course of the newly established Reserve officers' training unit in the Coast Artillery Corps Reserve. Previously, during the summer, he experimented with sailor life on a coast guard ship. It soon turned out, however, that this kind of life was not suitable for him due to constant seasickness. Moreover, as a young volunteer, he was mostly assigned to cleaning jobs only. In 1922, he was accepted to the advanced course in coast artillery and after he finished it successfully in June 1924, he began to serve formally as a second lieutenant of the Coast Artillery Reserve Corps, in the United States Army.

Figure 2: Victor Gondos Jr. in his High School yearbook

[13] Gondos, *Recollections,* 39.

His active military service was between 1924 and 1935. During this time, after graduating as an architect, he started working in his father's company as a design engineer.[14] Victor served mostly in Virginia and Maryland and his most frequent station was Fort Monroe, VA. Fort Monroe was the home of the most important American artillery school, where they had intense basic and special training programs such as general artillery, air defense, and coastal defense courses.[15] The artillery basic training took nine months, while the reserve officers and the officers of the National Guard had to participate in a two-month-long intense and specialized training. Victor Gondos Jr. himself completed several trainings of this sort. Beside these, he performed active-duty service several times at Fort Monroe where he usually trained with regular corps.[16]

The dates of his active-duty tours were the following:

- April 4–18, 1926, Fort Eustis, VA;
- August 8–22, 1926, Fort Monroe, VA;
- July 17–30, 1927, Fort Monroe, VA;
- August 12–25, 1928, Fort Monroe, VA;
- September 13–November 3, 1928, Coast Artillery School, Fort Monroe and Aberdeen Proving Grounds, MD;
- July 6–19, 1930, Fort Monroe, VA;
- August 2–15, 1931, Fort Monroe, VA.[17]

[14] The Gondos Company was a civil engineering company which was hired as contractor for several middle and high scale construction projects during the 1920s, mostly in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. These included several school buildings, and a couple of elegant hotels (e.g., Hotel Jefferson and Hotel Madison in Atlantic City). Usually all of these projects were designed by Victor Gondos Sr. Later both sons joined the family company for design and engineering works.

[15] About the history of Fort Monroe: https://www.nps.gov/fomr/learn/historyculture/index.htm, accessed January 10, 2023.

[16] *The Sunday Star, December* 23, 1928. Part 2. 5.

[17] US Senate Records, 1711/1636. VGJr. Military Record.

Figure 3: Victor Gondos Jr. (right) on bayonet training[18]

According to his military record, during his service he was one of the most diligent reserve officers. As the document tells us, "He contributed both time, effort, and traveling expenses above and beyond the average to do his part in fulfilling the hopes envisaged for the country's benefit in the National Defense Act of 1920."[19] Since the reserve officers usually served at their own cost and to the expense of their civilian occupation (unpaid leave in most cases) this means that Victor sacrificed his working hours and days off as well as his money for the army. This could have been the reason that by the end of October, in his fifth tour of fall 1928, President Calvin Coolidge appointed him – and another officer, too – as the best who completed the artillery training, deserving the rank of 1st Lieutenant.[20]

During his active years, Victor contributed heavily to increasing the professional military knowledge of officers in the D.C. area. Thus, an officer's club was established, named Coast Artillery Club, in Washington, D.C. Victor Gondos Jr. can be found among the founding members and later he acted as a secretary of the club, too. Apart from these, from the beginning of the 1930s he had been publishing articles on military top-

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[18] HSP 3082, Box 2, Folder 3.

[19] US Senate Records, 1711/1636. VGJr. Military Record.

[20] *Reading Times,* October 30, 1928.

ics regularly in the Coast Artillery Journal and local newspapers.[21] He was promoted to the rank of Captain in 1930 (Figure 4).[22] His hard work during the decade could have led to the promotion to the rank of Major. Most probably Victor Jr. could have further enhanced his good reputation among US Army officers. Based on his rising career, the assumption can be made that he could have received an even more important role during the Second World War, by which time he might have already been a chief officer. Had this become a reality, Gondos could have been one of the higher-ranking officers of Hungarian descent in the United States Army. The number of foreign-born individuals who served in the U.S. Army during the Second World War was over 300,000. These individuals, hailing from diverse backgrounds, made significant contributions to the war effort. The role of Hungarians in the Second World War in the U.S. Military, in contrast to the First World War and the Vietnam War, has not been explored yet.[23][24] Even less is known about Hungarian-born senior officers in the United States. Being a Major of the Organized Reserve, which Gondos had anticipated to become by the end of the decade, could have granted him active duty in the coming World War. The Organized Reserve did play a significant role in World War II. Organized Reserve officers constituted 52 percent of all officers killed in action, 28 percent of those missing in action and 27 percent of those captured by the enemy. Approximately one quarter of U.S. Army officers

Figure 4: Victor Gondos Jr. in his Captain's uniform

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[21] US Senate Records, 1711/1636.

[22] HSP 3082, Box 6, Folder 5.

[23] In connection with the First World War: see László Ambrus, „Az első világháború és az amerikai magyarok. Katonai szolgálat és sajtóbéli visszhangok, különös tekintettel New York államra", PhD Dissertation, (Eger, 2023). [The First World War and the Hungarian Americans. Military Service and Press Coverage, with Special Focus on the State of New York.]

[24] Regarding the Vietnam War and the Cold War in general see Endre Szentkiralyi, *Cold War to Warm Cooperation. The Military Service of Cleveland Hungarians. Egy amerikai város magyar katonái 1950–2014* (Bp.: Zrínyi, 2014). [Hungarian Soldiers of an American City]

who served during the war were from the Organized Reserve.[25] Gondos did not get an opportunity to be one of them, as owing to an unexpected event, the possibility of this was eliminated.

His illness and the end of his military career

The turning point of his military career came in the summer of 1928. More precisely, an event had happened at that time which could have led to it. This event is described in detail in the Report of the 76th Congress of the United States, Senate 3rd Session, April 24, 1940.

This report is a summary of the session in which the case of Victor Gondos Jr.'s veteran pension was discussed. In this discussion, the main question to be answered was whether he was entitled to a federal pension for veterans, based on his former military service.[26] From the text of the report, the circumstances of his illness and the period after, during which Victor had been struggling with health problems constantly, can be reconstructed as follows. Due to the length and detail of the report, I have briefly summarized the events.

During the summer of 1928, Victor Jr. received orders to report for duty on the 12th of August at Fort Monroe, VA. On August 11th, he departed from Washington, D.C. with another officer, Lt. Stanley McGee. Their plan was to sleep in Richmond that night and arrive in Fort Monroe by noon of the 12th. Sometime between 6 and 8 AM, an unexpected, severe storm arose, so they turned towards the city of Manassas to find shelter. Their car got stuck several times due to the weather conditions and the passengers became completely drenched. They needed to call for a special towing car to get into the city. They spent the remainder of the evening in Manassas. After some rest and drying out their uniforms and other belongings, they planned to continue their journey in the morning of 12th.

After the rain abated a little, the officers were busy getting information about the state of the roads. They learned that the flood over the entire watershed rendered most roads and bridges unsafe or impassable. Nevertheless, they had to push on due to the orders they had received. In the following hours, the rain became more severe again, "beating against the car with terrific force, penetrating every bit of fabric, drenching

[25] The official website of the United States Army Reserve. https://www.usar.army.mil/OurHistory/WorldWar-I-and-II/, accessed May 26, 2023.

[26] Congress created the Veterans Administration (V. A.) to oversee all cases related to former soldiers' pension.

one to the skin, and necessitating a lengthy halt in Fredericksburg to partially dry out car and occupants again."27 By this time they learned that passage was impossible towards both Richmond and Washington as the rain and the floods cut off all roads and bridges to both directions. Since they were under orders to report at their posts of duty, the officers had no choice but to make every effort to get to Fort Monroe at all costs. After the weather conditions let up a bit, they were able to reach Tappahannock, and crossed the bridge onto the road towards Richmond. They were probably the last car to make it over, since the bridge collapsed directly after their successful passage. After this, the road to Richmond, and from there to Old Point Comfort was mostly without incident. They reportedly arrived at Fort Richmond at midnight of the 12th and 13th of August, and were greeted by two Richmond officers. They completed the approximately 400-km-long (app. 250 miles) journey in more than one day.

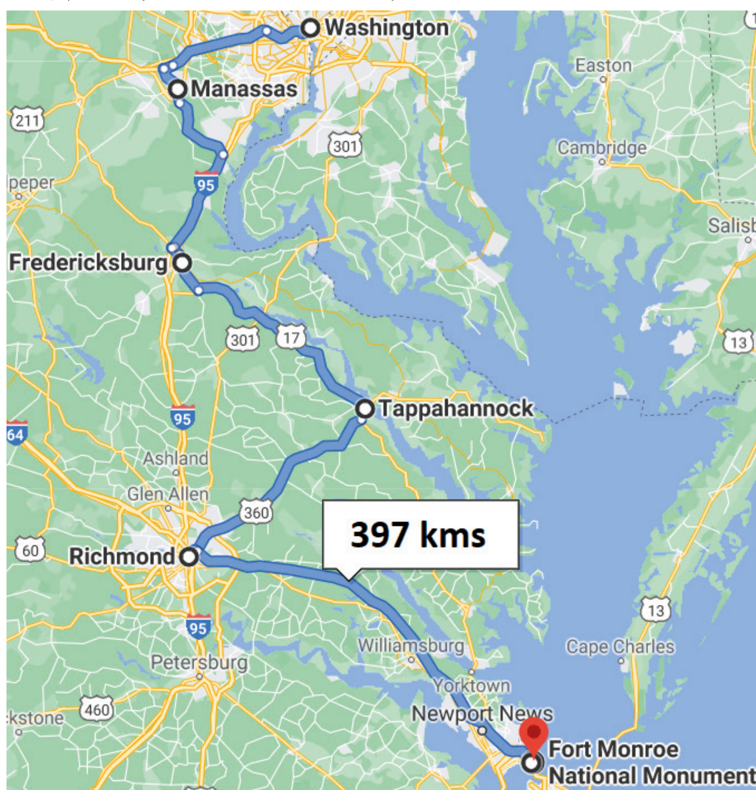

Figure 5: the road from Washington, D.C. to Fort Monroe, VA, on today's Google Map

[27] US Senate Records, 1711/1636.

Not long after these events, during the first week in camp, Victor Jr. began to feel uncomfortable around the region of the waist and hips, but not sufficiently to interfere with the performance of duty. He did experience several different sorts of pain, and a stiffness of his legs, which did not go unnoticed by his fellow soldiers. Since he was otherwise completely healthy, Gondos deemed these symptoms as a temporary unpleasantness and kept performing his duties without seeking professional medical help. After completing his tour of duty, and upon returning home, he kept experiencing different pains and began to walk with a limp. Since this was also occasional, he still did not think much of it. Due to his young age and good physical condition, he did not think he could have any serious problems.

In 1930, while he was on his sixth tour of duty at Fort Monroe, he had a minor accident. His boot heel was caught in a faulty step at the officers' mess, in the Old Sherwood Inn. After that, a strong waist pain and again, an uncontrollable limp appeared. However, it seemed to disappear after a period of time. Later that year, the pains recurred and Victor had to seek osteopathic treatments in Atlantic City, which again resulted in some relief. But from this time on, Victor had to battle regular headaches and neck stiffness. There was another minor accident during his tour of duty. At the end of the month, he attended cavalry training, during which he was heavily thrown off a horse. He was hurt in the lower back region, and subsequently felt soreness there, so ceased to attend further equine activities on that tour of duty. But he still had not considered this a serious problem, so he did not seek medical assistance, except for some basic osteopathic treatment.

Victor was able to perform in both his military and civil careers until the fall of 1931. By then, his back pains, headaches and neck stiffness developed more seriously. As he was trying to find a cure, he consulted a renowned Atlantic City surgeon, Dr. Roland de Hellebranth, to help him find out what his problem could be. The doctor finally stated that his problem may be an arthritis that had developed in his back. From February, 1932, his condition was so severe that he became permanently bedridden, and was deemed virtually disabled. As stated in the disability info part of his military record:

Besides a double curvature of the spine, which had developed, the left arm was practically immovable, and the shoulders, hips, and knees were affected and a partial closure of the jaw ensued.[28]

According to his commanding officer of the time, Hershel E. Smith, Victor's condition changed radically. He lost a lot of weight and even some of his height, he became stiff from his hips above, but he managed to keep his hopeful and cheerful nature. The seriousness of the illness put a lot of stress on not only him but his entire family. His

[28] US Senate Records, 1711/1636. Disability data.

brother, Robert, remembers this period several times in his memoirs. The course of the illness and its impact on the family can also be followed by reading the family correspondence. As a vivid example, the father, Victor Sr. writes about his son's condition to one of his sisters in Hungary as follows:

Victor has been suffering from a serious illness for months, maybe years. The name of this illness is Spondylitis (ossificians ligamentosa, – spine – stiffness) to which a so-called myositis, neck stiffness is added since last summer. […] Victor has been in a private room for eight weeks by now. He received treatment from several specialists and Pemberton. The progress, for those of us who only saw the slow destruction, is quite significant. But weeks, maybe long months can pass before Victor can be brought back home, and long months till he will be capable to work again.[29]

A letter from Victor Jr. to his brother Robert of April, 1932 shows that his condition was so serious that he had to be anaesthetized for a tonsil surgery with gas, because his illness prevented him from being able to open his mouth for local anesthesia.[30] Despite the months of treatment, we can read in the letters from August that his condition still had not changed for the better, and it even turned worse. In a letter for his father, Victor Jr. complained that a new pain developed in his back, which made it impossible for him to use the prosthetic equipment that had been a great help thus far. He also reports that one of his upper vertebrae became stiff. He expressed his hope that he may be able to walk again after his doctor returns from his holidays. Victor describes his condition with a military metaphor: "I rather feel that Gettysburg has been fought and won and the road is now clean toward Appomattox but of course that is not a short road."[31] With these civil war locations, he indicates that he is over a turning point in his illness and all that is left is the final battle that he must win. Unfortunately, he was wrong, Appomattox was very far from there. Four days later, he was forced to dictate his letter to his nurse because he was unable to move his right arm. The regularly recurring topic in the letters of 1932 is the matter of money – partly owing to the crisis that had developed in the meantime. Victor expresses many times in these letters how much it hurts him that his family is burdened by his treatment. The topic of performing beyond their strength usually appears in the letters between his parents and his younger brother, too. They had to pay Victor's expensive treatment in the middle of the great economic crisis, while their formerly lucrative construction business was constantly on

[29] Victor Gondos Sr. to Miklosne Somossy, April 3, 1932. Letter. From the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Gondos Family Papers, 1895–ca. 1978.

[30] Victor Gondos Jr. to Robert Z. Gondos, April 26, 1932. Gondos Family Papers.

[31] Victor Gondos Jr. to Victor Gondos Sr., August 10, 1932. Gondos Family Papers.

the verge of bankruptcy. These years are well described by the relevant parts of Zoltan's recollections:

For three years Victor suffered great pain from his spinal arthritis, but when he moved back to our Pennside home, in May 1933, a Dr. Alexander injected a solution of potassium iodide which had an almost miraculous effect in stopping the active arthritis process. Vic's illness had placed a great strain upon all of us, and we were relieved to see him improve.[32]

There was some improvement in his condition in 1934. At the end of the year, he was sent to Georgia for treatment. In his letter dated on 7th November, he reported good news to his family. He wrote that he felt stronger and had put on some weight: he weighed 111 pounds (50 kgs) that day. This low number also shows how serious his illness was and the deterioration it caused in his condition. He also added that his legs, especially his knees, had improved, but his back still got tired quickly. He considered his one-hour-long walk as a success. As soon as he was capable of longer walks, he regularly gave lectures on military topics – mainly in relation to the period of the Civil War – at the local high school.[33]

Due to the permanent treatments, his pains decreased steadily and in 1935 he was able to take longer distances again. To his whole recovery, a treatment in Hungary also contributed. By the middle of the 1930s, after their recovery from the economic crisis, the financial situation of the family made it possible for Victor to take part in a several-month thermal spa treatment in Budapest.

Since his ability to walk was still uncertain, his mother accompanied him for the journey. From the beginning of August, 1936, he took part in a strict series of treatments in the Saint Lucas Thermal Spa in Budapest. These included massages, baths and recreational gymnastics. In a letter of September 10th, his mother reported to her husband that Victor Jr. can lift his right arm a bit higher than usual, while in another letter eight days later she wrote that Victor was able to lift it above his head.[34] This was a serious improvement. Thanks to the treatments, his appetite also started to return and he was able to gain some weight. His mother expressed her joy in another letter as follows: "There are days when Vic's face looks decidedly round again. […] A few days ago, standing before the mirror, he admired the result of the treatments thus far: he looked almost as straight + erect as before his

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[32] Gondos, Recollections, 78.

[33] Victor Gondos Jr. to his Family, November 7, 1934. Gondos Family Papers.

[34] Victor Gondos Jr. to Victor Gondos Sr., September 10 and September 19, 1936, Gondos Family Papers.

illness."[35] Years of professional medical care in America, and the treatment in the thermal spa in Hungary combined, resulted in Victor's successful recovery from serious illness. But he had to practically rethink his whole life and start a completely new career.

Not only was Victor's military career destroyed by his illness but it also ruined his promising prospects as an architect. Owing to his long illness and his unfitness for active duty, in July 1935, the young Captain received his commission into Inactive Reserve. This statement hurt him incredibly because he was expecting to reach the rank of Major in that year. It also shows how important this was to him that in a letter of 5th January 1939, he asked the Governor of Pennsylvania, George Howard Erle, "to satisfy a sentimental ambition by according a disabled officer the courtesy title of Major".[36] Ultimately, his request was not fulfilled. As he was aware that his military career could not continue in its previous form, he had to find another way to stay close to the army. When his illness became weaker, Victor enrolled as a history major at the University of Pennsylvania. He graduated in 1941. This was the basis of his archivist and military historian career.

Historian and Archivist Career

After an almost ten-year-gap, in 1942, Victor started working again. Using his history degree, he began to work at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. From the beginning of the 1940s, he actively researched and published permanently in the fields of military history and archival history. Aside from this, he played an important role in ensuring that the Archives could prepare successfully for receiving and processing the huge number of military documents created during the Second World War. After the Second World War, he worked as a leader of several departments of the Archives. At first, he was appointed as the Archives' Editor of Microfilm Publications. After that, he was in charge of the business-economy, Civil War, and later the army and navy departments, as well. In this period, in 1947, he got married to Dorothy Ditter who was also a historian working at the American University as a college professor. An interesting fact about her is that Dorothy Ditter did serve in the U.S. army during the Second World War instead of her husband with a military background. As a WAVES officer (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), her duty was working on the logistics of replenishment of the Pacific Fleet in the Navy. At the end of the war, she was discharged as a First Lieutenant.[37]

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[35] Victor Gondos Jr. to Victor Gondos Sr., September 27, 1936. Letter. Gondos Family Papers.

[36] Victor Gondos Jr. to Governor George H. Earle, January 5, 1939. Gondos Family Papers.

[37] „Professor Dorothy Gondos Honored" – *The American University News Release,* May 10, 1974. 30. HSP 3082, Box 6, Folder 6.

Since the beginning of his career as a historian, Victor Gondos Jr. had been a member of the Association of American Archivists. From 1943, he was the leader of the Committee on Archival Buildings and Equipment and, in 1957, he was also elected as a regular member of the management. In August 1958, he was invited by the Civil War Centennial Commission to be a member of the advisory board.[38] This was one of the biggest recognitions for him during his career.

Figure6: Victor Gondos Jr. (right) in the research room of the National Archives[39]

Since he was an expert archivist and historian, and he was also a qualified architect with extensive professional experience, he had become a widely known expert in the field of planning of archive buildings and interior design by the 60s. From 1961, he published articles in Spanish, thus, he was visited from Latin America regularly with professional questions.

[38] Civil War Centennial Commission, The Commission's letter to Victor Gondos Jr, August 4, 1958. Gondos Family Papers.

[39] https://civilwartalk.com/threads/the-capture-of-jefferson-davis.79845/ accessed January 10, 2023.

In 1951, in recognition of his work as a military historian, Captain Victor Gondos Jr. was appointed editor-in-chief of Military Affairs.[40] From this time on, he carried the periodical almost on his own. His studies were regularly published in national professional journals – apart from the Military Affairs – mostly in The American Archivist. He wrote dozens of books and studies in the field of archival architecture and methodology. In addition, he taught archival administration, and history at the American University and he also gave methodology lectures at other universities. Finally, at the age of 63, he retired from the Archives in 1965.

On 20th May 1961, on the 10th anniversary of his promotion, the American Military Institute (AMI) organized a dinner party in his honor at the Washington Navy Club. At this event, he was greeted by prominent representatives of contemporary American military history and many high ranking officers. Others, including his parents who moved to Florida for their retirement years, sent their greetings in the form of letters. In a letter dated May 20, 1961, his parents wrote the following:

Thirty years ago your father […] was honored at a testimonial dinner given by his associates in the construction of a notable hotel building.

Today, eminent officers of our National Defense Department join with leading writers of military history and with your friends and colleagues in a Testimonial Dinner that expresses their appreciation of your ten years of faithful service as the editor of "Military Affairs".

As your parents, we are proud of you. […] in these troubled times may God give this Nation many more citizens with the same high dedication to noble purposes.[41]

[40] Stetson Conn, "A Tribute to Captain Victor Gondos, Jr. Editor of Military Affairs, 1951–1968", *Military Affairs* 32. (1968) 3. 109.

[41] Irene Gondos to Victor Gondos, Jr, May 20, 1961. Gondos Family Papers.

Figure 7: Victor Gondos Jr. and Robert Z. Gondos at the testimonial dinner organized by the American Military Institute in 1961[42]

An article published in the fall 1968 issue of *Military Affairs,* edited by Victor Jr. for more than fifteen years, states about him that "the military historians of the United States owe him a debt beyond measure." Not only did he edit the most important professional periodical but he also took an important part in organization of military professional public life as well as in establishing professional contacts.[43] Furthermore, he was also recognized as a military historian when he was awarded the title of honorary Colonel of the Virginia State Militia by the Governor of Virginia. For him, this could have meant some sort of compensation for his early discharge and for not receiving the rank of Major at the end of 1930s.

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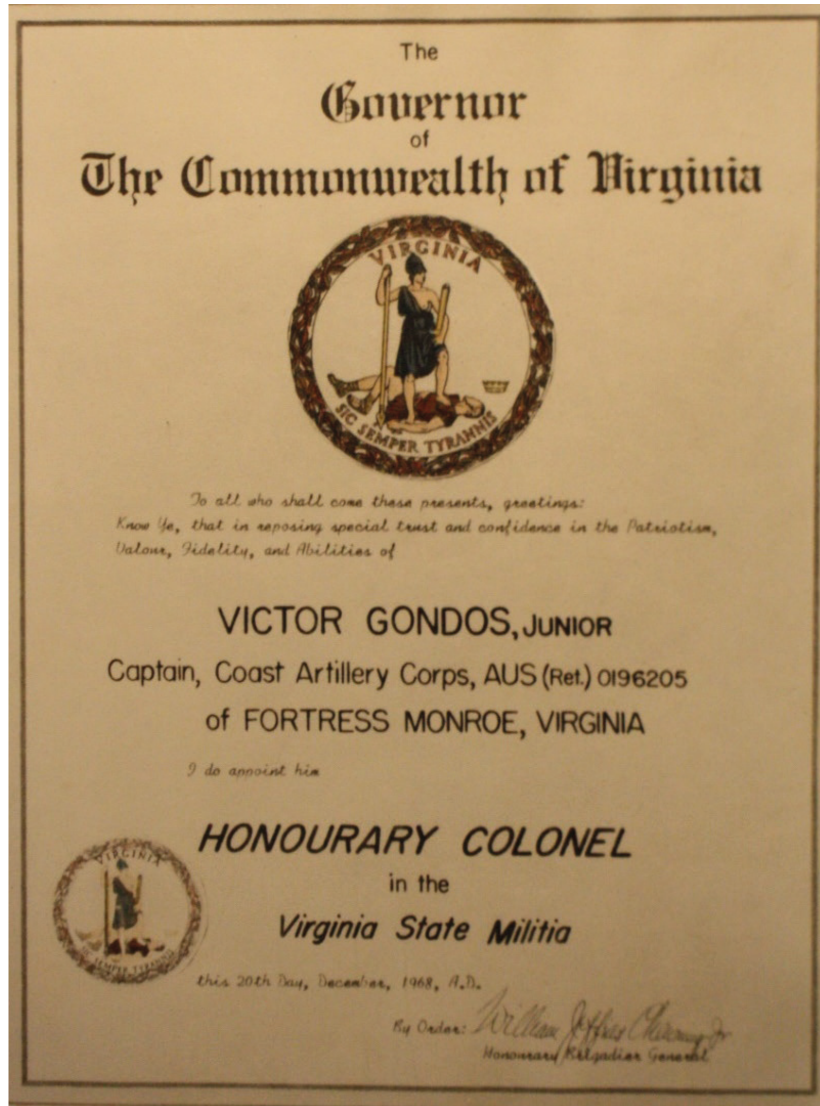
[42] HSP 3082, Box 6, Folder 10.

[43] Conn, *A Tribute*, 109.


The
Governor
of
The Commonwealth of Virginia

VIRGINIA
SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS

To all who shall come these presents, greetings:
Know Ye, that in reposing special trust and confidence in the Patriotism, Valour, Fidelity, and Abilities of

VICTOR GONDOS, JUNIOR
Captain, Coast Artillery Corps, AUS (Ret.) 0196205
of FORTRESS MONROE, VIRGINIA

I do appoint him

HONOURARY COLONEL
in the
Virginia State Militia

this 20th Day, December, 1968, A.D.

By Order:
Honourary Brigadier General

Figure 8: Diploma of the honorary Colonel award[44]

His last aim was a PhD degree in history which he finally received in 1971. In 1965, he enrolled in the "Modern American History" PhD program at the American University in Washington, D.C. His research topic was the establishment of the National Archives of the US, as well as the history of the social movement for the establishment of a unified federal archive. He graduated in 1971 and the title of his dissertation was *The Movement*

[44] HSP 3082, Box 6, Folder 7.

for the National Archives of the United States, 1906–1926.[45] The year before he enrolled in the PhD program, in 1964, the Society of American Archivists founded the Gondos Memorial Award with a 200-dollar annual prize to honor the best archival history essay of the semester written by a university student. The fund of the award was created from the donation of Victor Gondos Jr., Dorothy Gondos and Zoltan Gondos. They wanted to commemorate Victor Gondos Sr. with this award.[46]

Five years later, on 2nd March 1976, after a new spinal surgery Victor Gondos Jr. passed away. His wife, Dorothy still had a long and productive life ahead of her, she passed away in 2005. They were laid to rest in Philadelphia.

Conclusion

Looking at his early career and his superior officers' opinion, a promising military career awaited Victor Gondos Jr. Considering his progress, he would probably have served as a senior officer during the Second World War. Although his worsening illness broke this career and led to another life path, he developed a successful career with hard work and he still stayed close to the military.

At his alma mater, in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania, undergraduate students can receive several research awards. One of these is named after Victor: *Captain Victor Gondos, Jr. prize for the best research paper or thesis in military or diplomatic history.*[47]

As closing lines, let this quote about Victor stand here from a saluting article of 1968 which is a good description of his character:

Soldier, architect, archivist, historian, author, editor, with truly significant accomplishments in each field–few are the men in this modern age who can claim such versatility and achievement. Combine these talents with an affability that has triumphed over physical adversity, and you have Vic Gondos as we in the AMI have come to know him.[48]

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[45] Victor Gondos Jr, The Movement for a National Archives of the United States, 1906–1926. PhD dissertation, Washington, DC, 1971.

[46] The Gondos Memorial Award. The American Archivist 35. (Jan 1972) 1.

[47] https://live-sas-www-history.pantheon.sas.upenn.edu/undergraduate/research-prizes/ accessed January 10, 2023.

[48] Conn, *A Tribute,* 109.

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Rabeb Touihri

Making sense of the American Collective Identity through *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011): A Multi-method Analysis

Pro&Contra 6

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Abstract

American national identity has received much attention from multidisciplinary fields of research. Thus, this research deals with the role of heroes and villains in reflecting on post-9/11 events—specifically in Captain America: The First Avenger (2011). The focus is directed toward the symbolic meanings of the main characters in the chosen movie. Through cinematic representations, this research highlights the nexus between heroization, villainization, and the American national identity. The confrontations between American heroes and foreign villains in entertainment reflect America's global positioning as a superpower fighting "evil." I chose a qualitative research method to prove this hypothesis. I conducted a thematic analysis that involves decoding the main characters by examining their binary opposition and representation of the U.S. and the foreign enemy and their connotations within the broad context of reasserting and repositioning the U.S. as a global power after 9/11. I also decoded the meanings of key events within the movies in relation to their historical contexts and their connotations in a post-9/11 context. My theoretical framework relies mainly on Claude Levi-Strauss's theory of Binary Opposition, Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities, Jeffrey Alexander's Cultural Trauma, and Michael C. Frank's Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in post-9/11. This research suggests that the symbolism of Superheroes and Supervillains articulates their role in rebuilding national identity in post-traumatic times.

Keywords: National identity, Captain America, the Red Skull, cultural trauma, post-9/11.

Introduction

The American film industry plays a crucial role in reinforcing national identity in the wake of collective trauma experiences. It reflects the changes in American culture and how they shape and gets shaped by them throughout time. In his book *American Cinema/American Culture,* John Belton argues that "American cinema reveals, directly and indirectly, something about the American experience, identity, and culture."[1] Movies reflect the social reality of a given society and shape it, intentionally or unintentionally. The research to date has focused on national identity, binary opposition, films, and geopolitics separately. However, Identity Studies have recently become a research field that integrates various contributing fields, including geography, political science, history, ethnicity, and sociology, among other fields. Yet, studying national identity through the binary opposition between heroes and villains in cinema has not yet been investigated.

[1] Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture,* 2013, xvii.

Twenty-two years ago, the traumatizing nature of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 caused a cultural shock nationwide. This unique event has changed the course of American history and the world in general, for it divided the world into pre-9/11 and post-9/11 realities, and the Americans experienced what is known as collective trauma. The American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander argues that cultural trauma occurs "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever, and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways."[2]

Despite the adverse effects of the attacks, Americans needed a reassertion of their identity. They needed hope, embodied through firefighters who were considered national heroes in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Heroism is deeply embedded in American culture. The need for heroism was crucial to give Americans hope and strength in overcoming trauma. Dualistic morality is at the core of American values. Neil J. Smelser argues that the dualistic morality of good versus evil was represented through President George W. Bush's language in his address to the nation on the 9/11 attacks and the creation of the image of heroes as an immediate response to the events. Americans needed not only heroes but also a moral crusade against an "evil" enemy.[3]

The central claim of my paper is that American national identity is embodied through the binary opposition between the hero/U.S.A./the Self and the villain/Georival/the Other. The current research relies on heroization and villainization in investigating popular culture's role in reinforcing national identity in the post-9/11 traumatic period. The dichotomous relationship between the main characters in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) illustrates their importance in reassuring national identity in the aftermath of collective trauma experiences.

This study adopts a qualitative method to examine the binary opposition between superheroes and supervillains, analyzing its implications for national identity post-9/11. Thematic analysis will decode the symbolic meanings of characters and compare cinematic events with real-world events related to the post-9/11 narrative. The research's theoretical framework explores the intersections between the characters' binary opposition, cultural trauma, and the 9/11 attacks. It draws on critical theories such as Claude Levi-Strauss's Binary Opposition theory, Alexander's Cultural Trauma, and the Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the post-9/11 context. According to Levi-Strauss, media narratives, like films, often present opposing main characters, heroes, and villains, introducing contrast in their nature.

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[2] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 1.

[3] Smelser, "Epilogue: September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," 277.

My paper comprises three sections: The first section begins by presenting the evolution of the superhero character, Captain America, as a national symbol in American mythology by tracing his origins in comic books and his transformation into an eternal icon. It then focuses on Captain America's role in deconstructing American collective traumas through a quest for belongingness and the symbolism of his journey in a post-9/11 context. The second section introduces the supervillain, the Red Skull, his motives, his relationship with the superhero, and his symbolic association with Nazi Germany throughout the movie. The third section presents the research findings, sketching out the film's different cinematic representations of 9/11. I present the findings of this research, focusing on the cultural imaginary of terrorism and counterterrorism as part of the new U.S. security discourse in a post-9/11 world.

The Evolution of Captain America as a National Icon in American Mythology

The Golden Age (1938–1954) was characterized by the emergence of a new genre, the Superhero genre. This genre started in comic books by introducing the first icon Superman in the 1930s, which resulted in the creation of hundreds of superhero characters, including Captain America, in 1941, who became one of the most influential figures in American history.

Old Times Captain America in Comic Books

Joe Simon and Jack Kirby are two comic book masterminds who created many superheroes and brought them together under one universe called the Marvel Universe. They made Captain America at times when Americans were torn between interventionism and isolationism on the eve of World War Two: the period after the Great Depression was complicated for the people who had mixed opinions regarding interventionism. Simon and Kirby introduced Captain America as a new legend to the American people. He triggered public opinion about the war even before the United States participated. Captain America's origin starts with Steve Rogers, known as Captain America, trying to join the army but failing to do so due to his frail looks, disease, and weak body. Rogers was chosen for an experiment that would empower him physically and transform him into Captain America. This choice was his humanitarian and nationalistic sentiments which would result in the creation of a perfect soldier.[4]

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[4] Dittmer, "Captain America in the News," 146.

After a period of inactivity, Captain America appears again in comic books during the Roaring 60s to express the turmoil lived at that time. He embodied America's atmosphere and Americans' uncertainties, doubts, and despair at a time when many events were happening simultaneously, like the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, Feminism, President Kennedy's Assassination, and the Cold War. Critics like John Shelton Lawrence stressed the reason behind excluding and not involving Captain America in the Vietnam War. He explains that the American people did not support the Vietnam War then because it was a lost war from which the nation came out devastated and defeated.[5]

Another battle fought by Captain America in comic books was during the Cold War: in the 1980s, Simon and Kirby created another comic book issue, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, dealing with espionage and Communism. Captain America was called a "Nazi–smasher" during WWII and restyled as a red-baiting "commie–smasher" during the Cold War.6 These events picture the national as well as the international mood. In a nutshell, Captain America's re-appearance throughout American history makes him a "man out of time" who comes to save America whenever problems and crises to give Americans hope and lift their sense of national unity.[7]

Simon and Kirby brought Captain America into the Marvel Universe's continuum, making him part of the American Myth. This character survived decades of turmoil in American history through narrative devices. They made his comic book a highly elastic narrative revisited when needed, "seeing […] a readiness to embrace a shifting series of soothing myths over awkward or unpleasant historical facts."[8] Indeed, the shift from the emphasis on unpleasant past events toward a positive narrative through an existing myth could heal the audience.

Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence explain that this comic book character was a "non–democratic means to achieve democratic ends."[9] As part of American popular culture, the Superhero genre was used by politicians to advocate certain ideologies for the audience that believes in superheroes. Jason Dittmer claims and suggests that during the Bush administration's War on Terror, Captain America, among other superheroes, serves as "a crucial resource for legitimating, contesting, and reworking states' foreign policies."[10] This is a critical assessment of American foreign policy after 9/11 and the media's use in framing Americans' support for their policy.

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[5] Jewett, Robert, and John Shelton Lawrence. "Captain America and the Crusade against Evil," 28.

[6] Patton, "Review of Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence," 104.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Patton, "Review of Captain America, Masculinity, and Violence," 105.

[9] Jewett, Robert, and John Shelton Lawrence. "Captain America and the Crusade against Evil," 28.

[10] Dittmer, "Captain America in the News," 3.

The continuity of Captain America's narrative indicates its importance in the American mind. He plays a crucial role in expressing American cultural traumas and collective identity in different time frames. The development of myths throughout American history ensured the acceptance of new mythologies quickly, and this could be the reason behind the birth of many figures in American culture. However, Captain America's myth remains unique, for it is timeless. It serves many purposes, among which are political, social, cultural, and psychological. The continuity of his narrative depended on fighting evil. He fought against Nazi Germany and Communism and tried to unite the nation during the 60s national turmoil. In this sense, his narrative reveals much about the cultural traumas experienced.

The Role of Captain America as a *Monomyth* in Revealing American Cultural Traumas

One of the foundations of American society is dualistic morality, as Neil J. Smelser calls it. He argues that moral orientation in American society is one of its core values. He asserts that "the moral thread has also been central in literature and entertainment, notably the Western film."[11] Smelser explains dualistic morality in terms of the national reactions to the 9/11 terrorist attacks focusing on the choice of words President George W. Bush used in his speech on 9/11, 2001, for he "took up the language of evil, personalizing the latter in Osama bin Laden, and continued to repeat the theme. His public utterances were also sprinkled with cowboy, posse, "dear-or-alive" talk, all consistent with the good vs. evil symbolism, and framing the national response as a moral crusade against a 'sacred evil.'"[12]

Americans' immediate responses to the attack were also embodied in creating heroes and seeking existing ones after the traumatic experience. As mentioned in previous parts of this research, heroes embody this dualism of a "good" America versus an "evil" enemy. The creation of heroes after a traumatic event represents hope and strength, and they are regarded as a "barometer of the collective's moral and emotional state and conflicts. How the image of the hero evolves tells us more about the psyche of the society at any given moment than the individual or group identified as the hero."[13] Goren also emphasizes the role of the hero in reflecting collective traumas, focusing on New York City firefighters' mission in rescuing people.

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[11] Smelser, "Epilogue: September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," 276.
[12] Smelser, 277.
[13] Goren, "Society's Use of the Hero Following a National Trauma," 37.

American Collective Identity during Cultural Traumas

Cultural sociologists argue that 20th-century America experienced cultural traumas, defined as events leaving lasting marks on collective identity. Trauma is socially constructed, resulting from unexpected events affecting a group. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks had a profound impact on American identity, fostering a sense of national unity. This cultural trauma heightened the importance of national identity while diminishing other subnational identities. *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) portrays World War II as a backdrop of collective trauma, with the character of Captain America representing the nation's efforts to overcome the war's trauma and combat evil threatening its core values.

Political scientist Elizabeth Theiss-Morse observed an increase in the display of flags across the US after September 11, symbolizing a renewed sense of community. Americans have long felt connected to each other, as Benedict Anderson described in *Imagined Communities* (1991). He views a nation as an imagined community, where individuals share a common identity despite not knowing most fellow members. He used the term imagined to point out the imaginary, nonexistent, and elusive quality of the actual event. He continues to explain that "imagination informs trauma construction just as much when the reference is to something that has actually occurred as to something that has not."[14] In this sense, both Alexander and Anderson believe that not only actual traumatic events can affect identity but also imagined and constructed ones. Captain America embodies this collective identity, representing the nation's values and serving as a unifying figure during World War II. The film uses propaganda and media to reinforce this collective identity, making Captain America a symbol of patriotism and nationalism, shaping the shared national identity. While the movie depicts events from the past, its production reflects contemporary times and highlights the enduring importance of collective identity. The views presented complement each other, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the American experience after September 11. Anderson's concept of an imagined community extends beyond geographical boundaries, encompassing shared beliefs, history, traditions, and more, uniting the nation. American cinema reflects this sense of unity and national identity by portraying external threats in various symbolic forms, culminating in the U.S. victory over its adversaries. These heroic narratives offer catharsis, purifying and restoring positive energy within the community. Heroes serve as therapeutic figures, providing inspiration, hope, and strength as role models for people. Overall, these perspectives shed light on how collective identity and cultural trauma intersect in shaping the American narrative.

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[14] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 8.

Examining Captain America's Monomyth in the American Collective Identity

Joseph Campbell's monomyth, the Hero's Journey, aims for improvement and enhancement goals. It is widely applied today, with the hero's mission to uplift the human spirit. Captain America's journey exemplifies this journey, beginning with ordinary life in Brooklyn, advancing through military acceptance, change, gaining superpowers, helping friends, defeating enemies, and returning to normalcy. Consequently, his journey is as follows: ordinary life => adventure => ordinary life. Captain America's journey parallels America's 20th-century history; born on the 4th of July 1918, symbolizing Independence Day, and the U.S. victory in the Great War. He became a comic book superhero in 1941, leading U.S. forces to victory. He represented the turmoil of the 1960s with the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. During the Cold War, he fought Communism and symbolized Americans facing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after losing his best friend. He also appeared in the 9/11 context amid another traumatic event, embodying the American Dream and identity in the superhero genre. His lifeline aligns with 20th-century American history, making him a visible symbol of America.

The creation of Captain America's icon could not have happened without choosing the right person for the experiment. As a story of origin, there was a focus on the traits of the experimented. Doctor Erskine was looking for unique attributes because he knew that the Super-Soldier Serum amplified the subject's characteristics from his first experiment on Schmidt. Steve Rogers was a perfect choice because he showed patriotism, courage, humbleness, and wisdom. Despite his weak physique, he struggled to get what he wanted—joining the U.S. military service, and this makes Rogers an interesting case to study because he struggled to belong within society.

Marginalization and the Search for Belongingness through the Character of Steve Rogers

Simon and Kirby introduced the audience to the protagonist Steve Rogers as a human being with defects. At first, Rogers' narrative begins by showing a feeble man in constant struggle with the circumstances surrounding him, one of which would be the struggle to belong to American society. Throughout his life, Rogers faced marginalization and isolation because he was physically weak. People did not accept him for his differences except for his only friend, James "Bucky" Barnes, who accepted him for his flaws. At the same time, Rogers considered him a social link. Indeed, the Marvel Universe aims to make the audience identify with Rogers, as a human being, from the start, so Rogers was seen as a frail, marginalized, and isolated member of the society who, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is looking for safety in order to jump to the next step, which is be-

longingness. Because of his bodily deterioration, Rogers was subjected to violence and bullying by others who were physically stronger than him. Simplicity is vital in formulating the audience's identification process with Rogers. This section deals with the shift from the comic book to its film adaptation, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011).

The Transformation to Captain America

Rogers' narrative structure moves along as he tries to enlist in military service. The audience is captured by his motivation and willingness to serve his country. He is portrayed as an individual who desires to stick to his beliefs and moral values and attain his goals regardless of physical limitations. An individual cast away from his society can sacrifice anything for the sake of belongingness. Henceforth, the narrative changes to give Rogers a chance by being accepted into the military service after failing four times and having the opportunity to overcome his physical ailments by injecting the super-soldier serum into his body. Indeed, this physical transformation gives the character a new personality, that of Captain America, and satisfies his second need, safety.

Rogers undergoes a transformative journey, embracing his flaws and turning them into virtues, which leads to societal acceptance. This reflects the inherent social norms in any society. His narrative portrays the complexities of social rejection before his transformation in the first Captain America movie (2011). The ongoing conflict of being out of sync with time highlights the importance of belonging, resonating with the audience's shared feeling of marginalization. His dual identities as an individual and a superhero blur reality and fiction, impacting both his personal and collective journey. As a man out of time, fulfilling his mission causes both trauma and healing.

Post-9/11 American Foreign Policy and the Therapeutic Aspects of Captain America

Judith Jordan's Relational-Cultural Theory posits that human beings need a connection to thrive, and that isolation leads to suffering at both personal and cultural levels. This idea is exemplified in Rogers' relationship with his childhood friend, James "Bucky" Barnes. Bucky served as a social bridge for Rogers, providing a sense of belonging. When Bucky seemingly dies in *The First Avenger* (2011), Rogers mourns and seeks revenge on Hydra. However, in *The Winter Soldier* (2014), Rogers discovers that Bucky is still alive but transformed into the Winter Soldier. Despite Bucky's memory loss, Rogers believes he will eventually remember his identity. Bucky remains the bridge to belonging for Rogers, as the only person who can relate to him generationally. The audience witnesses how the

Winter Soldier refrains from killing Captain America, showing that goodwill can overcome barriers in a relationship when someone truly matters to another person.

The audience can identify with the protagonist in another way; Steve's reaction to his loss highlights his journey toward finding meaning by taking revenge on Hydra. The latter is emblematic of the 9/11 attacks when the U.S. witnessed one of the most horrible events in its history. The American people mourned their dead, and the government expressed its grief through the War on Terror's immediate declaration. As Dittmer puts it, "to understand the symbolic and dichotomous relationship between Captain America/U.S.A./Self and the Supervillain/Georival/Other, attention must be paid to the history of the Captain America icon itself."15 By substituting Captain America for the U.S.A. and Hydra for Terrorism, the American audience may identify with Captain America, for he symbolizes patriotism. He also represents the motivation driving the country to avenge its enemies by winning an imaginary war on the screen.[16]

Superhero contribution to the American collective identity has recently been a research field for scholars interested in understanding the complex nature of U.S. identity transformation after the 9/11 attacks. This dissertation sheds light on Captain America as an enduring icon for Americans by aligning his lifeline along 20th-century American history. Though fictional, Simon and Kirby ensured that Captain America would remain part of American mythology and, subsequently, the American national identity. The film director Joe Johnston succeeded in implementing American values like patriotism, honesty, individualism, and self-reliance throughout the movies. They created a monomyth whose lifeline is compatible with 20th-century American experiences like World War One, World War Two, the Cold War, and the War on Terror. The transformation of the comic genre from the written to the visual demonstrates the importance of the genre in the U.S.

Movies have a dynamic role in capturing and delivering cultural traumas to the audience. Simon and Kirby not only captured cultural traumas but also helped the audience find a way to feel a sense of belonging. They created a character, Steve Rogers, who suffered from marginalization, bullying, and isolation in his social environment and tried hard to join the society. He was physically empowered, but what made him accepted was his inner goodness, his honesty, and self-reliance. Rogers tried to overcome different problems with Nick Fury's help, who wanted to integrate him into society again after his long sleep. Avenging America's attack seemed to be an American principle innate in America's foreign policy and emphasized in the American film industry. Although Captain America reflects American national identity, he cannot fulfill his role without his counter-

[15] Dittmer, "Captain America in the News," 631.

[16] Parker & Hammer, "Captain America: The Search for Belonging," 123.

part—the supervillain. To understand the complementary relationship between the hero and the villain, an emphasis on the French anthropologist Claud Levi Strauss's theory of Binary Opposites is crucial in this work. The superhero and the supervillain's analysis depends on the categorization of each character depending on specific criteria.

Claude Levi-Strauss proposed the Binary Opposites theory, positing that narratives contain opposing main characters in written or visual forms. These opposites help develop the plot and the narrative. For example, in a superhero movie, the binary opposite could be good versus evil, hero versus villain. The idea of oppositional hierarchy denotes that understanding a term within a pair of related terms would depend mainly on both terms in that pair. For example, if one wants to explain good, he/she should explain evil and vice versa. Though the first part of this paper deals with the superhero characteristics, Captain America, the latter can only exist with its counterpart, the Supervillain, which is very important in understanding this genre's plot and narrative.

Understanding Character and Characterization through the Villain, the Red Skull, in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011)

In his book Superhero: *The Secret Origin of a Genre,* Peter Coogan explained the symbolism of the superhero and the supervillain. What characterizes the superhero genre is not only the Superhero but also the existence of its counterpart, the Supervillain. Their existence is proportionate. Coogan defines the Supervillain as "[…] a villain who is super, that is, someone who commits villainous or evil acts and does so in a way superior to ordinary criminals or at a magnified level […] the supervillain is as the reverse of his foe the superhero […]."[17] As such, supervillains are of "five types: the monster, the enemy commander, the mad scientist, the criminal mastermind, and the inverted superhero-supervillain."[18] Just as the superhero highlights society's virtues and values, the supervillain enacts the reverse of those values: a cut-off with all the moral values in each community. Moreover, the supervillain can enact that inversion by forcing the superhero to rise and defend those virtues.

The Superhero–Supervillain Relationship through Proactivity and Reactivity

American melodrama encapsulates heroism, victimization, and the capacity to overcome psychological difficulties. Narratives provide a basis for the government's exercise of military and economic power, fostering a moral obligation to fight evil by associating America

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[17] Coogan, Superhero: *The Secret Origin of a Genre,* 76.
[18] Coogan, 61.

with victimhood. Elizabeth Anker depicts melodrama as a cultural mode shaping political discourse and national identity in contemporary America.[19] She explores how 9/11 was framed through melodrama, reinforcing American collective identity. Melodrama constructs a narrative wherein a villain threatens America; it frames a narrative that requires reparation for suffering. It demands heroic action to challenge any offensive attack on the country, "the villain thus becomes the catalyst for state action, and hence for what it means to be America, for, without a villain, there is no victim and thus no hero or heroic feat."[20] This binary opposition between hero and villain is crucial, reinforcing a sense of belongingness.

Supervillains and superheroes share various connections. Both Rogers and Schmidt underwent experimentation with the Super-Soldier Serum, resulting in physical and moral enhancements. Schmidt views himself and Rogers as "Superior Men," but they represent opposing forces. Coogan distinguishes characters, stating that villains are proactive, while heroes react to their threats, justifying their use of violence.[21] Captain America wields a shield for defense, while Schmidt holds a gun, symbolizing aggression and proactivity. The superhero's reactivity stems from their code, driven by the pursuit of the greater good and society. Superheroes are willing to infringe upon others' civil and legal rights due to their code, based on the principle that their powers grant them the right to take justice into their own hands.[22] This idea is encapsulated by Stan Lee's axiom: "With great power comes great responsibility."[23] Superheroes often assume dual identities to uphold justice, combat corruption, and confront evil, utilizing their abilities and power to act.

The Representation of Nazis through the Red Skull Character

The Red Skull, also known as Johann Schmidt, is an egocentric scientist who believed in the ideology of Ubermensch = Overman = beyond human. It is a concept where the superhuman race is destined to rule ordinary people. The term Ubermensch was used frequently by Hitler and the Nazi regime to describe their idea of a biologically superior

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[19] Anker, "Villains, Victims, and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and 9/11," 22.

[20] Anker, "Villains, Victims, and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and 9/11," 26.

[21] Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre,* 11.

[22] Coogan, 112.

[23] This quote is often attributed to the legendary co-creator of many Marvel Comics characters, Stan Lee. The quote is often associated with Spiderman, but the exact source of the quote is difficult to pin down as it has been used in various works of comics and media over the years. (For Marvel fans, one can easily notice the presence of Stan Lee in the movies in different scenes, which alludes to his importance.)

German race. The Nazi notion of the master race also spawned the concept of "inferior humans," who should be dominated and enslaved. From this idea, one can notice that Schmidt and Hitler share the same ideology of the existence of "inferior" and "superior" men.[24]

Hydra, in this movie, is the scientific branch developed by Schmidt and Dr. Zola under the sovereignty of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler. Schmidt's allegiance was to Hitler; however, after acquiring his new powers, he shifted his loyalty to himself because he believed in being an Overman. In this case, Schmidt wanted to be superior and have God's power.[25] Throughout history, the Red Skull symbolizes death, evil, and everything dangerous and bloody, while Red is associated with blood.

Figure 1. Hydra's Logo : Red Skull

Interestingly, Hydra's symbol is like the Nazi Swastika: Simon and Kirby designed the emblem of Hydra as a Red Skull with six tentacles or legs in red while the background is black, as shown in Figure 1,[26] whereas, in Figure 2,[27] the Nazi flag is composed of three colors: red, white, and black. Kiki Evans argues that the Nazi swastika "looks similar to the tentacles on Hydra's logo"[28] and that both flags symbolize their followers' ideology.

By possessing these characteristics, Schmidt is now the symbol of death and every evil on earth. He represents anarchy, fascism, and the ultimate foil of Captain America's principles of democracy and freedom. Since Captain America's Star-Spangled Costume

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[24] Cybulska, "Nietzsche's Übermensch."

[25] *Captain America: The First Avenger,* Dir. Joe Johnston, Perf. Chris Evans and Hugo Weaving, 2011, DISNEY PLUS, scenes taken at (01:44:03–01:44:17).

[26] Evans, "Marvel: 10 Weird Details You Didn't Know about the Hydra Logo."

[27] "German 'Nazi' Swastika Flag."

[28] Evans, "Marvel: 10 Weird Details You Didn't Know about the Hydra Logo."

with red, white, and blue colors represents the U.S. flag and signifies loyalty to American values, the Red Skull's redhead represents nihilistic intentions to seek bloodlust at the cost of democracy for the sake of power. He also symbolizes dictatorship since he considers people enslaved and rules as he wishes without restrictions.

Figure 2. German Swastika Flag

According to Nietzsche, the Overman possesses the ability to influence humanity indefinitely, impacting people's thoughts and values for generations to come. The Overman uses their will to dominate others' minds even after their death. Schmidt, as the Red Skull, sees himself as a superior being with godlike powers, granting him the right to rule. Despite physical enhancements from the Super Soldier Serum, the serum also deforms his face, amplifying his evil traits as a cunning and formidable mastermind of warfare and science. He conceals his deformity behind a mask but elaborates on his ideology to Captain America, rejecting national boundaries and asserting the power of gods. Captain America rejects Schmidt's offer, but Schmidt continues to assert his viewpoint.[29]

Schmidt tries to convince Rogers that he is no simple soldier, and that Rogers is afraid to admit it. Schmidt is proud of being powerful and embraces it proudly and without fear. He also explained his plan for a world without flags united under his rule. Indeed, before the U.S. joined the Allies in their fight against the Axis, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) delivered a speech on March 15, 1941, where he spoke about Germa-

[29] *Captain America: The First Avenger,* Dir. Joe Johnston, Perf. Chris Evans and Hugo Weaving, 2011, DISNEY PLUS, scenes taken at (01:06:25–01:06:47) and (01:44:01–01:44:15).

ny's New World Order, recognizing the threat Hitler posed to the democratic countries, including the U.S. FDR was aware of it when he exposed the real goal behind Hitler's ambitions to rule the world. In his speech, he argued that,

[…] Nazi forces are not seeking mere modifications in colonial maps or minor European boundaries. They openly seek the destruction of all electoral systems of government on every continent, including our own. They seek to establish government systems based on the regimentation of all human beings by a handful of individual rulers who seize power by force.[30]

President FDR explained what Nazis call New Order: it is not ordering. For order to be achieved, there must be justice. He continues to explain that "humanity will never permanently accept a system imposed by conquest and based on slavery. These modern tyrants find it necessary for their plans to eliminate all democracies—eliminate them one by one. The nations of Europe, and indeed we, ourselves, did not appreciate that purpose. We do now."[31] Comparing both Roosevelt's statement and what Schmidt admitted to Captain America, it is evident that Schmidt shares the same dreams as Nazi Germany, therefore, represents it.

The Marvel Universe presents controversial similarities between Hydra and Nazism, as well as between Hitler and Schmidt. The "Heil" to Hitler and "Hail" to Hydra comparison raises debates and questions about whether Hydra is a Nazi organization. While Captain America's comic book was created to fight Nazi Germany during WWII, the portrayal of Hydra in the movie differs from the original comic. Hydra, a fictional terrorist organization, shares characteristics with Nazi Germany, such as weapons, scientific advancements, power, and vigilance, and their uniforms resemble Nazi attire, albeit with a different logo.

During WWII, when Germany was at its peak between 1939 and 1941, and Britain was left to fight them, Captain America's comic book gained popularity in the U.S., contributing to a shift in public opinion towards supporting the Allies. The comic book encouraged interventionism after Germany's invasion of France, Italy, and Belgium. Captain America's emergence as a symbol of freedom fighting coincided with the U.S. being seen as "the Great Arsenal of Democracy," as President FDR described it, influencing public opinion towards interventionism in the face of tyranny.

In the movie, it seems that the filmmakers displayed Captain America as a "Nazi Fighter" without having him fight the Nazis but "punching" Hitler over two thousand

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[30] Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War,* 632.

[31] Fussell, 635.

times in his entertaining shows.32 It seems confusing that Hitler was never shown in the movie; however, in the entertaining shows, someone played his role as the enemy while Captain America fought him several times. *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) is a faithful adaptation of the 1941 Captain America comic book. The narrative places the movie within its historical context but contains some elements representing the current epoch's atmosphere.

Cinematic Representation of 9/11

The analysis of the superhero and the supervillain as representatives of both the U.S. and Nazi Germany in Captain America: The First Avenger (2011) in post-9/11 times shows that the American film industry is still revisiting past events and remolding them to cope with the contemporary situation. Smelser argues that the American reaction to 9/11 events contains "a certain old-fashioned quality to it: a reassertion of the virtues of nation and community; unashamed flag-waving patriotism; a feeling that we, as Americans, under attack, were one again; and a feeling of pride in the American way of life, its values, its culture, and its democracy."[33] From here, one notices the importance of repeating U.S. past victories during the post-9/11 period for that it reassured the American collective identity and strengthened the feelings of patriotism. It brings feelings of nostalgia to the pre-Vietnam atmosphere of pride and invincibility.

Additional elements alluding to 9/11 in *The First Avenger* (2011) support this research's central argument: the binary opposition between the hero and the villain influences the American collective identity in the post-9/11 attacks. The reproduction and reconstruction of past events in films produced after 9/11 have affected American collective identity. Indeed, reproducing past U.S. victories in movies sends a message of reassurance about the nation's unity and pride. Coogan argues that there is a difference between comic books and movie adaptations because superhero movies are not based on novels or specific texts. The reason behind the success of superhero movies is the use of resonant tropes. That is,

Every Superhero, particularly the ones who have been around for decades, has certain tropes—familiar and repeated moments, iconic images and actions, figures of speech, and patterns of characterization that have resonance; that is, they embody or symbolize some aspects of the character, and have gained this resonance through repeated use by

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[32] *Captain America: The First Avenger,* Dir. Joe Johnston, Perf. Chris Evans and Hugo Weaving, 2011, DISNEY PLUS, scene (01:01:18–01:01:22).

[33] Smelser, "Epilogue: September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," 270.

storytellers[34].

For Captain America, one of these moments occurs during the story of his transformation into a Super-Soldier. Over the years, this moment was repeated in the retellings of Captain America's origin. The most important moments in superhero films remain unchanged, whereas film directors can change the details without affecting the character's trope.

Captain America of the comic book does, indeed, represent the U.S. during WWII against its enemy, Nazi Germany. However, in the movie, he saves the country from an imminent attack: He learns about the ultimate plan of the Red Skull, which is to attack the U.S. He leads an attack on Hydra's base in the Alps and tries to stop the Red Skull's plan. With the fight between Hydra's followers and Captain America's fellow soldiers at its peak, the Red Skull gets onto the *Valkyrie*, Hydra's massive aircraft bomber, and heads toward the U.S. coast. In the meantime, Captain America managed to follow him and get into the plane at the last minute. When he gets onto the plane, he sees three bombs ready to be dropped over Boston, Chicago, and New York.[35]

Contemporary filmmakers strive to adapt old ideas to the post-9/11 era, necessitating adjustments to bring movies up to date.[36] These changes are vital for aligning the film with its contextual backdrop. Moreover, Michael C. Frank presents a model of the cultural imaginary of terrorism in his book *The Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in Public Discourse, Literature, and Film: Narrating Terror*. His model builds upon Graham Dawson's definition of cultural imaginaries as extensive networks of interconnected discursive themes, images, motifs, and narrative structures publicly available within a culture, reflecting its psychological and social dimensions.[37] Frank's study explores the dynamic interplay between reality, fiction, and terrorism discourse, analyzing literary and cinematic works predating and following 9/11. He emphasizes the indispensability of the imaginary in counter-terrorism discourse as it enables individuals to cultivate their imagination to prevent potential collective traumas in the events of similar attacks.

Frank believes that "post-9/11 counterterrorism discourse […] has made the imaginary an integral feature of homeland defense and thus a basis for political practice."[38] In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 2001, the Bush administration established a security discourse based on prevention— a paradigm shift processing uncertain and

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[34] Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre,* 7.

[35] *Captain America: The First Avenger,* Dir. Joe Johnston, Perf. Chris Evans and Hugo Weaving, 2011, DISNEY PLUS, scene (01:40:00–01:40:20).

[36] Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre,* 11.

[37] Dawson's definition of cultural imaginaries, quoted in Frank 2017, 18.

[38] Frank, "At War with the Unknown," 485.

unreal threats.

Frank argues that this new security discourse on counterterrorism should include more than facts and data concerning goals, strategies, and means used in the attacks and the imagination of possible present and future events. His model of the cultural imaginary of terrorism suggests that the imaginary help prevent the nation's collective traumas resulting from a possible future terrorist attack by preparing the people psychologically and providing as many scenarios as possible. Besides analyzing facts, the security discourse aims to secure the nation's imagination by brainstorming possible attacks on the country and providing solutions.

The Secretary of State, Donald Rumsfeld, argued in a speech on January 31st, 2002, that the U.S. military needs transformation. He continues to wonder,

Who would have imagined only a few months ago that terrorists would take commercial airliners, turn them into missiles and use them to strike the Pentagon and the World Trade Towers, killing thousands? But it happened. And let there be no doubt, in the years ahead, it is likely that we will be surprised again by new adversaries who may also strike in unexpected ways. And as they gain access to weapons of increasing power—and let there be no doubt but that they are—their attacks will grow vastly more deadly than those we suffered several months ago. Our challenge in this new century is a difficult one. It's really to prepare to defend our nation against the unknown, the uncertain, and what we must understand will be the unexpected.[39]

Interestingly, Rumsfeld described the attack as "unimaginable," resulting in a collective shock because people could neither expect nor imagine such an attack. He discussed "new adversaries" by emphasizing the difference between the new century's unpredictable enemies and the old predictable ones. Rumsfeld continues to assert that the U.S. military can no longer resort to the old methods used with old predictable enemies by justifying and supporting the new defensive strategy of preemptive attack, a strategy used to attack Iraq. He explicitly calls for preemption: "[W]e have to put aside the comfortable ways of thinking and planning, take risks and try new things so that we can prepare our forces to deter and defeat adversaries that have not yet emerged to challenges."[40] His speech was part of the more significant new security discourse in the post-9/11 attacks by focusing on a significant point: he wanted to prepare the U.S. citizens for future attacks orchestrated by unknown enemies, which could be much worse than the 9/11 attacks.

In the aftermath of the attack, sociologist Frank Furedi argues that the acquisition of counterterrorism intelligence was repeatedly described as "a problem of imagination

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[39] "Secretary Rumsfeld," "31 January 2002," 2.

[40] "Secretary Rumsfeld," "31 January 2002," 3.

rather than of information."[41] The creation of imaginative scenarios soon became an official means of complementing—and, if necessary, substituting for—observation and analysis, a trend that Furedi recognizes as "a tendency to overlook or minimize the role of research, reasoning, and analytical thinking for making sense of this subject."[42]

Moreover, counterterrorism discourse not only relied on collective data on the goals and strategies of terrorists, but it also depended on exposing the nation's imagination to possible present and future threats. Furedi thinks that "imagining evil [was] presented as the medium through which understanding of the terrorist threat may be gained […] which makes the difference between actual and fictional threats increasingly difficult to discern."[43] As a result, Homeland Security turned to Hollywood screenwriters and directors to help with creating imaginary attacks because it is believed that "Hollywood's take on terrorism in the 90s […] was absolutely more acute than virtually any intelligence report I read when I was in the Pentagon [comment by retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters]."[44]

According to Michael C. Frank, before 9/11, popular literature and Hollywood movies were considered to provide better assessments of future threats than intelligence agencies. Following the 9/11 attacks, government intelligence specialists collaborated with top Hollywood filmmakers and writers to brainstorm possible terrorist scenarios and devise solutions to counter those threats. This emphasis on imagination and creating "what if" scenarios aimed to avoid trauma and address failures in imagination, policy, capabilities, and management revealed by the 9/11 attacks.

Media scholar Richard Grusin, in his book Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11, argues that premediation, through imagining various scenarios, eliminates the category of the unimaginable. This perpetual exercise of imagination creates a constant, low level of fear or anxiety about another terrorist attack, preventing citizens of the global media sphere from experiencing the systemic or traumatic shock produced by the events of 9/11.

Captain America: The First Avenger (2011) contains visual elements connoting the 9/11 attacks, like the airplane, New York City, and an archvillain. This part focuses on the camera movements and the visual elements relevant to the current hypothesis. Camera angles affect the messages the director wants to deliver to the audience. In this scene, the camera moves in a way to show the three bombs differently: the film director Joe John-

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[41] Furedi, *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown,* xxiv.

[42] Furedi, xxvii.

[43] Furedi, *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown,* xxvi.

[44] Furedi, xxvii.

ston uses a high camera angle when showing both the bombs with the labels Chicago and Boston next to each other within the same frame to diminish and make the object less important (as shown in Figure 3).45

Figure 3. The High Camera Angle of Chicago and Boston's bombs

He then uses another high-angle shot to show another bomb with the label New York (see Figure 4).[46] The camera angle focuses on the New York bomb more than the other two because it is more important for Captain America since he is from Brooklyn, New York. This scene is accompanied by tense and threatening music, which makes the situation very dangerous. Figure 4 can be seen as a direct link to the events of 9/11: in reality, the 9/11 attacks were a series of airline hijackings and suicide attacks carried out by a terrorist organization called Al Qaeda, whereas, in the movie The Red Skull planned a series of aerial suicide attacks on different U.S. cities starting with Boston, Chicago, and New York. The difference between real and imagined events is that the enemy succeeded in their attacks. At the same time, in the movie, Captain America manages to save the cities and especially New York, by sacrificing his life for the greater good of the American people.

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[45] *Captain America: The First Avenger,* Dir. Joe Johnston, Perf. Chris Evans and Hugo Weaving, 2011, DISNEY PLUS, shot taken at (01:40:08).

[46] *Captain America: The First Avenger,* Dir. Joe Johnston, Perf. Chris Evans and Hugo Weaving, 2011, DISNEY PLUS, shot taken at (01:40:12).

Figure 4. High Camera Angle Shot of New York's Bomb

The next shot in this scene is a single low-angle shot of Captain America. The camera focuses on his facial expressions, which indicate he is very concerned about his mission to save his country, especially New York. While on the *Valkyrie* heading towards the U.S. to destroy it, Captain America prevented bombs directed by pilots towards many cities, including New York. Bombs were bearing names of U.S. cities. One of the enemy's pilots took off with the bomb, but Captain America jumped over it and redirected it toward its origin, the Red Skull's colossal plane. It is no coincidence that Captain America prevented an imminent threat that resembles the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. This element existed neither in the original version of the comic book nor in Captain America (in its 1990s version). The binary opposition between Captain America and the Red Skull lays the ground for understanding the metaphorical usage of these two main characters in The First Avenger. These metaphors are necessary for understanding and contextualizing the narrative in its historical context.

Conclusion

This research introduces *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) as a medium through which national identity scripts are narrated. Whether intentional or unintentional, cinematic representations of American national identity have a certain degree of reality; based on Alexander's concept of cultural trauma, individuals can be affected by reconstructed traumas or events that have not yet occurred. The use of different theories in this research aims to prove this hypothesis. I integrated various strands of theory from multidisciplinary research areas to contribute to new grounds in studying popular culture

in relation to identity and geopolitics. Combining Anderson's Imagined Communities, Strauss' Binary Opposites, Alexander's cultural trauma, and Frank's cultural imaginary, I can say that through movies where the hero holds the same identity as the viewer, the process of identification takes place, and the viewer develops certain feelings as part of the gratification process.[47] The viewer seeks to satisfy specific needs, such as overcoming cultural trauma and preparing for the unexpected to build popular resilience.

The cultural imaginary of terrorism and counterterrorism is a new way to connect cinematic representations of identity and U.S. foreign policy visible. Although the U.S. has had many enemies throughout history, the confrontations between American heroes and foreign villains, though the goal seems to be entertainment, relate tremendously to reality. My analysis results suggest that the two characters' binary opposition, where the heroes are identified as Americans and the villains as outsiders, reinforces American national identity during collective trauma experiences. According to Frank, "the pivotal task here [in these scenarios] is to anticipate—on the basis of fact and conjecture—who could strike [,] when [,] where [,] and how."[48] It seems extremely important to imagine the perpetrators of the imaginary attacks to perceive any future threat to the nation.

The multi-method analysis of *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) reveals a multifaceted portrayal of the character and its significance in various contexts. The analysis of the binary opposition between the superhero and the supervillain suggests a complementary relation between both characters who symbolize the U.S. fight against its adversaries. The symbolic meaning of the binary opposition between the hero and the villain is associated with "[…] the production and consumption of popular culture, which leads to the internalization of the mythic and symbolic aspects of national identities."[49]

Through the lens of cultural trauma, the movie highlights the impact of historical events, such as the 9/11 attacks on national identity. It also implies the importance of symbols in reinforcing collective identity and nationalism. Examining Captain America's character from the perspective of Judith Jordan's Relational-Cultural Theory emphasizes the importance of belongingness and connections. Hitherto, Captain America's journey from a weak and marginalized individual to a national symbol of courage and patriotism resonates with the American audience's desire for a unifying hero during times of nation-

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[47] According to the Use and Gratification Theory (UGT) is a communication theory that deals with the effects of the media on people. According to communication.org, UGT "explains how people use the media for their own need and get satisfied when their needs are fulfilled." Source: "Communication Theory-Uses and Gratification Theory." Communication Theory, https://www.communicationtheory.org/uses-and-gratification-theory/, accessed August 4, 2023.

[48] Frank, *The Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in Public Discourse, Literature, and Film: Narrating Terror,* 3.

[49] Dittmer, "Captain America in the News," 626.

al crisis. Overall, the movie weaves together multiple conceptual frameworks to explore themes of identity, cultural trauma, heroism, villainy, and symbolism.

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Emese Kunkli

Female Voices: Review on Éva Antal and Antonella Braida's *Female Voices: Forms of Women's Reading, Self-education and Writing in Britain (1770–1830),* Besançon: Press Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2022.

Pro&Contra 6

No. 1 (2022) 75–81

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Review on Éva Antal's and Antonella Braida's *Female Voices*

Éva Antal and Antonella Braida were the editors of the anthology called *Female Voices: Forms of Women's Reading, Self-Education and Writing in Britain (1770–1830),* which focuses on Anna Jameson, Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Georgiana Cavendish, Hannay Cowley, Helen Maria Williams, Jane Austen, Jane Marcet, Madame de Staël's, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Hays, Mary Shelley, Mary Tighe, and Mary Wollstonecraft. From the *Introduction,* we can learn that the female writers of the time (1770–1830) conspicuously sought to educate their readers by providing them with quality reading. The editors want to reveal how diverse the forms were that British women authors experimented with in the indicated era, and at the same time show what similarities can be discovered between the development of these female writers and their ideas about development.

The fourteen studies in the volume follow each other based on five thematic units. The first section—*Cross-cultural Connections across the Channel*—opens with an essay by Hannah Moss. The author analyzes the work of the French Madame de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), which Moss considers not only a tragic love story, but one that gives an account of the national character of Italy in opposition to Britain. Staël's work was immediately translated into English, and the vast majority of British reviewers believed that the moral views of the Italian woman would have been unacceptable in British society. The main merit of the study is that it shows that the competing receptions and parodies of the work reveal how incompatible it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century for a woman to have a career (even one that involved fame) and a happy private life at the same time.

David García's study is dedicated to Jacques-Henri Bernardin de St. Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie*'s (1788) translation by the British writer and translator Helen Maria Williams. The author explores the poetics and politics of the translation. The study focuses on Williams' sonnet sequence and its possible additional meanings, which Williams included in the English version of *Paul et Virginie* as part of the narration. Garcia draws our attention to the fact that this translation can lead to questions about, for example, the possibilities of (female) writers and poets during the French Revolution.

Héléne Vidal's essay aims to present the written works of Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, focusing on the views she reveals in her works on 18th-century education in the context of elite culture. Her three works, *Emma; Or The Unfortunate Attachment: A Sentimental Novel* (1773), *The Sylph* (1779), and *Zillia* (1782), all present the moral character development of the heroines. From the study, it emerges that, unlike many other contemporary sentimental novels and educational dramas, the writings of the Duchess do not end with marriage, but partly feed on her own life to show what problems elite ladies may have encountered after marriage. In her writings, the motive of self-education can be seen as an escape from fashionable society.

In the second section—*Writing the Female Self and (Self)-Education*—the topic of Dóra Janczer Csikós's paper is the circumambulation of the discursive context in which Mary Hays wrote her work, *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). Among other things, it shows how *The Lady's Magazine* played an important role in the education of women at that time. Csíkó also presents that Hays' writing explores topics such as gender inequality, the harmful consequences of a woman growing up socializing only with men, and how a woman can deal with the absence of sufficient female connection and communication.

Anthony John Harding's study is also dedicated to Mary Hays, but he deals with the author's work entitled *Female Biography* (1803), in which Hays aimed to collect writings by women living in different countries and times. These works are about women and for women. Hays also sought to provide women with an educational resource that helps them develop their talents. The study perceptively represents how Hays, mentored by Wollstonecraft, adhered to the traditions of enlightened women's thoughts while portraying how they could lead without idealizing her gender. She also spoke of the prejudices and abuses they had to experience with their fellow women, which affected those of lower origin even more.

Nóra Séllei deals with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Séllei reflects on the approach to the female body we can read from Wollstonecraft, and also on the relationship between the female body and the male body, and how the way a woman experiences her body can affect her upbringing and intellectuality. Furthermore, the study covers the intellectual milieu in which the text was born; and tries to point out why Wollstonecraft's approach to this theme was original. In addition, Séllei also talks about the reception of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*

Kiel Shaub's paper deals with *Frankenstein*, the first novel by Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter Mary Godwin (later Mary Shelley). Shaub shows how the complex critique of arts-and-sciences culture, which the writer formulates in her novel, can be interpreted as a gender definition of disciplinary relations. Shaub considers it relevant to look at Godwin's education and early work. He reports that Godwin was a regular participant in the public lectures at the Royal and Surrey Institutions. Seemingly she needed the experience she gained there to write *Frankenstein*, a novel in which the central male characters as men of science dominate the narrative, while the female characters, who can be associated with poetry and literature are located on the margins of the narrative. Based on Shaub's essay, we can see *Frankenstein* as a condemning witness to the emergence of modern science and technology.

The third session was entitled: *Reading and Experiments in Form.* Here, the series of studies is opened by Angela Escott's essay, in which she examines Hannah Cowley's long poem about the 1799 defense of the Syrian city of Acre by Sir Sidney Smith against

Napoleon's attacks, and places it in the tradition of contemporary women's poetry. The central question of the study is why an author with such excellent dramatic skills as Cowley did not write a stage drama from this historical episode. In this period, not only the scenery in the theatres improved a lot, but the sound effects too, and they were also able to create lightning effects, which could have made the theme of this current event more sensitive. However, Escott argues that Cowley still used her dramatic talent to write this epic poem, emphasizing the personal impact of this event on the citizens and the moral crises it caused to the community as a whole.

In her essay, Harriet Kramer Linkin aims to demonstrate the consistent commitment of the Anglo-Irish poet Mary Tighe to scholarship and self-education and to what extent this is due to be homeschooled by her mother. Kramer emphasizes that Tighe championed women's education in her self-education and her poem *Physche*, in her novel *Selena*, and also in her two-volume collection of poems, *Verses*. The study places great emphasis on Tighe's 1831-page untitled diary written in the years before her death, in which we can read her critical comments on 246 Italian works related to self-education. These are complemented by Mary Tighe's correspondence with an antiquarian, Joseph Cooper, from whose private library she borrowed half of the analyzed books. Based on the essay, together, the diary and the 58 letters serve as a rich archive of the serious work Tighe invested in this research and thus in her self-education in the last years of her life.

In Krisztina Kaló's study, we get to know Clara Reeve, an English novelist, who recognized the growing influence of the novel as a genre and then used it to communicate her opinion on many topics. Eventually, she became one of the most influential educationalists of the second half of the eighteenth century. Kaló focuses on her 1791 novel. *The School for Widows*, which, in her opinion, not only gives insight into the condition and aspirations of contemporary women but also masterfully demonstrates a brave but not radical way of thinking of an intellectual woman. Reeve became an authoritative writer at a time when literacy was primarily a male prerogative. In her three-volume epistolary novel, she focuses on widowed women who survived the misfortunes of their marriages and, thanks to their love of reading and self-education, profited from their widowhood and became worthy members of contemporary British society. Based on the study, Reeve skillfully benefited from the narrative genre (epistolary novel) she chose, as readers could easily imagine themselves in the characters' situations.

Angelika Reichmann deals with Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Mysterious of Udolpho* (1794). Reichmann starts from the fact that many critics believe that Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (1818, completed in 1803) can be interpreted as a parody of Gothic novels. (*The Mysterious of Udolpho* also appears intertextually in the novel.) Reichmann also draws our attention to the fact that Austen reformulates the elements of the female

Gothic novel that can be interpreted as subversive, and in the education and development of her heroine, we can discover Mary Wollstonecraft's educational principles. Reichmann is trying to demonstrate that, in her way, Radcliffe subverts the male-dominated thesis of the late eighteenth century too. Reichmann admits that the development of Radcliffe's Emily is more limited than that of Austen's Catherine. However, in her judgment, the fact that the eighteenth-century understanding of Bildung does not apply to Emily does not make *The Mysterious of Udolpho* itself an *anti-Bildungsroman*.

The Last section—*Women's Critical and Economic Thought*—opens with Marie-Laure Massei-Chamayou's essay, which shows that through their works, Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth tried to develop their female readers' insight into the contemporary economy and educate them in the management of money. And this was also important because, in this period, women were often able to learn about current economic situations through fictional stories. While Edgeworth mainly tried to educate her readers on the basic principles of the domestic economy, Austen helped women in the interpretation of material reality. (In Austen's above-mentioned novel, *Northanger Abbey*, Edgeworth's *Belinda* [1801] also appears intertextually, so it is clear that Austen was influenced by Edgeworth.) According to Massei-Chamayou, Edgeworth's and Austen's works testify that they both had an excellent understanding of the symbolic stakes of fashion and marriage as a market. The fact that they had to survive in the economy at a time when there were only a small number of female writers, certainly contributed to all of this. That is why, in order for their heroines to fulfil themselves as women and wives, it was necessary for them to be reliable and sufficiently competent in economic matters.

Alexandra Sippel writes about the educationalist Jane Marcet's *Conversations* (1805, 1816), which contributed to the promotion of education according to the principles of *political economy* among the less educated in England. We have to think mainly of working-class men and middle-class women who had to understand the basic principles of the law of the market. Marcet rejected the view fostered by socialists such as Locken, Smithian and Ricardo that the luxury of the rich caused the deprivation of the poor. She argued that a capital increase would be necessary so that the working population would have a job and suitable living conditions. Sippel emphasizes that Marcet never took part in political activities and did not show any intention to disrupt the established social order. In addition, one learns from the study that Marcet not only wrote books on economics but also took the trouble to author a grammar book for children, in which she made the tasks more interesting by teaching them stories.

In the final study of the volume, Magdalena Pypeć analyzes the Anglo-Irish historian of art and literature Anna Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines* (1832), which is both a conduct book and literary criticism from the perspective of feminist dialectics. Jameson

seems to have found the diverse and realistic depiction of women in Shakespeare's plays liberating. Pypeć demonstrates how Jameson used Shakespeare's twenty-three heroines to broaden and reformulate the too-narrow possibilities of female propriety, which were popularized in conduct books and literary work at the time, through the analysis of their characters. So, in her work, Jameson not only placed these heroines in the foreground but also voiced her insights on topics such as the legitimization of women's professional training and economic self-sufficiency as well as women's appearance in the public sphere.

Overall, *Female Voices* is a very well-done and informative volume. It is highly recommended to everyone who wants a more comprehensive insight into the (self-) development of women writers of 1770–1830, their works, and their effects on their fellow writers and readers, and also how these authors contribute to relevant contemporary debates. One by one, the studies are interesting and thorough works, and the volume itself is logically structured, so the connections between the essays are clear.

Sumyat Swezin

Transformative Journey of Women on Screen. Review on Lisa V. Mazey (ed.), *Cinematic Women, from Objecthood to Heroism: Essays on Female Gender Representation on Western Screens and in TV Productions.* Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2020.

Pro&Contra 6

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Transformative journey of women on screen

Over the last few years, revolutionary Western cinema has been a critical battleground in a number of debates concerning 21st century cinematic culture, female identity, and representation on screen. After several decades of misrepresentations of women in the media, the Western film industry has experienced a paradigm shift in its understanding of gender roles, largely driven by the emergence of global social movements like #MeToo and Time's Up, which have catalyzed a new realm of social discourse focused on critically evaluating the normative values and beliefs that shape societal structures. The increasing prevalence of multifaceted and inclusive female characters in mainstream films, who boldly deviate from the narrow confines of the "manic pixie dream girl" archetype, serves as a remarkable testament to the Western film industry's unique capacity to both reflect and challenge the normative ideals of women's identities in the contemporary sociocultural landscape.

As the result of the Northeast Modern Language Association's 50th conference, held at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., *Cinematic Women, from Objecthood to Heroism* (2020) edited by Lisa V. Mazey has gone to great lengths to encourage its reader to reconsider the multifaceted representations of women on screen. This volume is a masterful reflection on how women's psyche, subjective experiences, transcendence, individuality, empowerment, and spirituality are presented in Western films and television series from the 1950s to the present day. It takes the reader through the journey of the evolution of female roles on Western screens, scrutinizing the male gaze, the commodification of women, girlhood, LGBTQ+ themes, and maternity, while also speculating on the potential cinematic female roles in the future. This collection also deals with how films can contribute to fortifying the image of women and what causes women to be iconoclastic socio-culturally, both on and off screen.

The organization of the volume is carefully thought-out as it is comprised of eight chapters partitioned into three sections based on three perspectives of viewing women on screen: the traditional objectification of women, the contemporary portrayal of women as protectors or saviors, and the potential future portrayal of women as commanders. The first section of the volume delves into the complexities of gendered objectification, exploring the male gaze paradigm and the ways in which women, through their struggles to assert their agency, strive to transcend the limiting confines of being objectified and reclaim their subjectivity. In the very first chapter, "The Danger of Obsession: Questions of Power and Freedom in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)," Mazey focuses on the presence of female vulnerability and beauty shaping the obsession effectuated by one's use of power on another (17) while also drawing attention to masculine desire and struggle for power by assuming a protective role over an object (9). In the following chapter, Yeojin

Kim explores multiple gazes and transnational assemblage in Chan-wook Park's *The Handmaiden* (2016), the adaptation of Sarah Water's *Fingersmith* (2002), questioning whether a transnational female assemblage can challenge the traditional male gaze and offer a new heterosexual gaze paradigm (20). According to Kim, Park employs the "gaze" in order to assist the female characters in their escape from the patriarchal imperial structures (20). She also describes the ways in which Park's protagonists share their fragmented gazes and reclaim their agency from patriarchal surveillance, dividing her analysis into three parts: the imperial male gaze, the non-heterosexual sapphic gaze, and the cinematic gaze (21).

The second section contextualizes the broader portrayal of the complexity of female consciousness, barriers of transcendence, and the revolutionary spirit through the female bodily experience, rather than the stereotypical representation of women as mere "objects of desire," which is emphatically present in the first section of the volume. Mary Jane Androne investigates strong, heroic, unconventional adolescent tomboys portrayed in Grannik's films, *Winter's Bone* (2010) and *Leave No Trace* (2018). She illuminates the significance of the "voice," highlighting how the young women depicted in Grannik's films vociferously assert themselves, and her essay unfolds a comprehensive analysis of the nuanced girlhood, indicating the strains and conflicts that emerge from the conventional representations of gender, sexuality, and identity. In Chapter 4, Forrest Johnson discusses feminine transcendence in contemporary post-secular cinema, more particularly in *The Fountain* (2006), *Silent Night* (2007), and *The Tree of Life* (2011). He explores how the selected films open up the world of transcendental experience through creating gendered dissymmetry and elevating the female protagonists as domestic redeemers or spiritual links (59). By drawing upon Gilles Deleuze's concept of "time image" and "belief in the world," Johnson argues that the female protagonists in the films are idolized as otherworldly, transcendental entities, with their embodiment of the miraculous, and they serve a crucial role in cultivating belief in the world.

The volume's final section provides an in-depth analysis of the portrayal of women who challenge established gender norms by embodying traits conventionally ascribed to masculinity and breaking the boundaries of gender binaries to pave the way for a more inclusive and fluid understanding of gender roles. In Chapter 5, E. Leigh McKagen investigates imperial domesticity and salvation narratives in *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001), asserting that "women play a pivotal role in the evolution of the narrative of Euro-American imperialism to become a narrative of salvation, both internally and externally" (82). *Voyager*, narrated from the perspective of a caring and passionate female captain in a male-dominated society, marks a progression of female representation on screen at the beginning of the 21st century (92). McKagen expounds upon the caring and compassionate role, spiritual journey, and leadership of the female lead in *Voyager*, who never-

theless fails to fully surmount the traditional gender role. In the sixth chapter, Karen J. Tuthill-Jones delves into a critical examination of the television series Sleepy Hollow (2013-2017), with a particular emphasis on the portrayal of the main female characters and the traditional masculine dominance exhibited by the character of Ichabod Crane. By scrutinizing the show, Tuthill-Jones embarks on a quest to unravel the interplay between femininity and masculinity, striving to comprehend the intricate relationship between these two constructs. Following that, Hyunyoung Moon examines how the concept of the "warrior" adapts to the changing warfare, that of drones and robotics in the films: *Good Kill* (2015) and *Eye in the Sky* (2016). She elucidates the paradox that despite contemporary warfare not necessarily requiring traditional warrior traits, the military continues to accentuate them, while also speculating on the potential for women to embrace the position of "warrior," a role historically occupied by men. Moon also asserts that the fact that a female character, initially intended for a male actor, emerges as the most competent and professional among the cast, underscores the intricate and evolving nature of women's roles in the realm of war films (119). Evangeline Kroon, in the concluding chapter, investigates the representations of women in the post-apocalyptic world, meticulously scrutinizing the female characters that inhabit the bleak and despairing universe of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), and contemplating upon the divergences they manifest from their counterparts in other post-apocalyptic fictional works. Indicative of her groundbreaking findings, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) serves as a compelling testament to the emergence of women from obscurity as they boldly take the spotlight, rejecting their objectified and subservient portrayals while wholeheartedly embracing their autonomy, assertiveness, and capacity to challenge, and dismantle patriarchal essentialism. Kroon also believes that "increased female representation in post-apocalyptic films can lead to opportunities for advancement in female casting, dialogue, and understanding" (142).

A profound examination of the portrayal of women in Western films and television shows, evaluated through various dimensions, reveals that cinema has undergone notable advancements in the representation of powerful female characters, suggesting a hopeful prospect for the cinematic portrayal of women. In Chapter 4, the sole male contributor to the volume undertakes an exploration of the divine feminine, carefully examining the complex and diverse representations of women in the chosen films, taking a holistic approach, and ultimately revealing a nuanced understanding of the feminine experience. Through his scrutiny of feminine transcendental figures, which stand in stark contrast to those explored in the opening section, his contribution to the volume enriches and expands its intellectual horizons, imbuing it with a sense of depth and complexity. The volume's inclusion of non-Hollywood film, the visually stunning South Korean movie *The Handmaiden* (2016), is a commendable feature, yet its scholarly richness could be further

augmented by a broader selection of international films that represent different cultures and regions, particularly from the Arab world or Europe, offering a more comprehensive analysis. Additionally, the volume's sections capture the evolving spectrum of female identities and reveal the gradual dismantling of traditional gender roles, yet the enduring dominance of masculinity, depicted in chapters 5 and 6, creates a sense of tension, a dissonance between conservative norms that uphold male superiority and the potential future societal view of women.

With the goal of equipping readers with the necessary theoretical framework, the scholarly essays in the volume are ambitious and offer a wide range of unique perspectives. Capturing the newfound paradigm on gender norms in the Western films and television series, *Cinematic Women, from Objecthood to Heroism* is a positive affirmation for women and makes an enormous contribution to feminist film studies by exploring how the representation of women on screen might be altered over time—from zero to hero.