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Table of Contents

Notes on Contributors

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Dr Fabien Carpentras is currently Associate Professor at Yokohama National University, Japan. His interest lies primarily in film theory and Japanese modern history, specifically the period of 1968 and the influence it had (and is still having) on Japanese politics and society. He is also a regular contributor to the film magazine *Eiga Geijutsu*.

Robert T. Cummings is a research scientist for the computer science and interdisciplinary studies departments at Morehouse College, USA. He has earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Morehouse College. Cummings has published ten publications in Black identity development and supplemental tool development to assist Black students through academia. Notably, he has published and presented on STEM Hip-hop pedagogy and using YouTube videos and social media influencers as advisors for underrepresented minorities. He has an interest in human factors and user experience with ethnic-conscious and culturally relevant entertainment and leisure consumer products.

Dr Hojeong Lee is an Instructor in the Temple University Klein College of Media and Communication, USA, and brings her expertise on digital diaspora and social movements. Her doctoral dissertation, "Digital Media and the Korean Diaspora: A Journey of Identity Construction", examines how the development of digital media influences diasporic members' social interaction and how this change helps them reconstruct their identities within transnational contexts. Her other research has investigated interplay among digital culture, social movement, and identity of digital media users. She also examines online hate communities and their online discourse construction process. She teaches various courses, including global media, media criticism, and cultural differences in Temple University, USA.

Emmanuel Sunday Nwofe is a doctoral student at the University of Bradford, UK. His main research interest is in areas of political communication, film studies, digital culture and journalism. He joined the academe in 2012 at the Ebonyi State University Nigeria, where he tutored undergraduate modules in mass communication before embarking on a study leave to the UK. He obtained a Master's Degree in Film Studies at the University of Bradford in 2012, a Master's Degree in Mass Communication at University of Nigeria Nsukka in 2010, and a Bachelor Degree in Mass Communication at Ebonyi State University in 2005. Mr Nwofe has submitted his PhD thesis and is awaiting viva voce. His doctoral thesis, which is titled New Media and Social Movement, examined how the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement has used the internet to mobilise for an independent Biafran state. He has previously examined the sentiments of pro-Biafran campaigners on Twitter after the UK voted to leave the European Union. He is currently working on the "Dialectic between news values and agenda-setting role of the media in the era of political polarisation".

Editor's Introduction

The *IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film* (*JMCF*) is associated with IAFOR's *MediAsia, FilmAsia* and *EuroMedia* annual conferences. *JMCF* is committed to publishing peer-reviewed scholarship that explores the relationship between society, film and media – including new and digital media, as well as to giving a voice to scholars whose work explores hitherto unexamined aspects of contemporary media and visual culture.

Last year, The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film (MediAsia2018), featured the conference theme of "Fearful Futures" that encouraged scholars to reflect upon the role of arts, humanities, media and cultural studies in the contemporary global context of information/disinformation exchange, national and international tensions and polarized politics. This sixth volume of the *IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film* features contributions from multiple disciplines and nations from around the globe, and extends the conference theme with a specific focus on social movements. The articles in this issue present dialogues on the ways in which media in its various formats (from billboards to manga, films to online) facilitate the formation, expression and representations of social movements.

The issue starts its exploration with two articles discussing social movements in action. Hojeong Lee's article *Digital war of South Korean netizens in New York City: From Tweets to a Billboard Advertisement, and an Alt-Right Online Community* explores the appropriation of both physical and online spaces by the alt-right in South Korean politics. Focusing on an incident in which advertising was placed in Times Square, Lee considers how meme culture enabled the transmission and transformation of meaning from an online community to a wider transnational offline context. In *The Internet and Activists' Digital Media Practices: A Case of the Indigenous People of Biafra Movement in Nigeria*, Emmanual S Nwofe argues for the vital and central role of digital media, and specifically internet use on the consolidation of the notion of Biafra independence in the Nigerian public sphere.

The next three articles examine the relationship between social movements and media texts from different perspectives. Alberta Natasia Adji's examination of Guillermo del Toro's 2017 film *The Shape of Water* in *Falling for the Amphibian Man: Fantasy, Otherness, and Auteurism in del Toro's "The Shape of Water"* considers the stylistic features of the film and filmmaker to support a reading of the film as protest against Trump-era immigration and social policies. Next, Robert Cumming's article *Black Struggle Film Production: Meta-Synthesis of Black Struggle Film Production and Critique Since the Millennium* explores a genre of film that highlight experiences of challenge for African Americans: Black Struggle Films. Adopting a meta-synthesis and thematic analysis approach, Cummings highlights the attributes of Black Struggle Films that distinguishes them from other films featuring African American cast and/or characters, with the aim of enabling producers to better support representative and influential films about the Black experience.

Finally, Fabien Carpentras examines the manga *Red* (2006–2018) in his article *Memory Politics and Popular Culture – The Example of the United Read Army in the Manga "Red"*. Through a visual analysis of the manga and an exploration of the author's political stance, Carpentras argues that popular memory of the Japanese terrorist group United Red Army is reshaped through the fictionalisation of real life individuals, as well as the presentation of events through the perspective of "ordinary" members of the group. The resulting effect is a distancing from the social and political context of the group and its activities that clouds an understanding of the role played by the group in contemporary Japanese politics.

The JMCF Editorial Board owes a debt of gratitude to our external peer reviewers, notably Dr Ana Adi (Quadriga University of Applied Sciences in Berlin), Shmavon Azatyan (La Trobe University), Dr Buket Akgün (Istanbul University), Dr James Rowlins, and Dr Paul Spicer (Hiroshima Jogakuin University). We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to the IAFOR Publications team, our authors and dedicated readership.

Dr Celia Lam
Editor
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Digital War of South Korean Netizens in New York City:
From Tweets to a Billboard Advertisement, and an Alt-Right Online Community

Hojeong Lee, Temple University, USA

Abstract

This study explores how people share their political perspectives within online communities, construct online discourses on social and political issues in digital spaces, and finally utilize offline venues to grow their base of supporters as a form of social movement. The researcher examines the events related to a series of birthday wish ads for the South Korean president in Times Square in 2018 and the responses of Ilbe, an alt-right online community, to the occasion. I use three lines of inquiry: 1) How did the Ilbe online community users facilitate online discussions in order to lead to offline social action? 2) Why did the Ilbe members create the advertisement in Times Square? and 3) What are the implications of the billboard within political and social contexts?

By closely examining the recent digital confrontation among different online groups in South Korea, this project yields insights into understanding the current social movements based on digital media, and in particular, an alt-right group. The findings of this research demonstrate how social action can be mobilized based on online communication, and how faithfully the Ilbe community performs its role as a representative alt-right community of South Korea during the political turmoil. Finally, the current study articulates the relations between the digital world and physical space.

Keywords: alt-right community, social movement, Ilbe Storehouse, public space, online ethnography, digital media

Introduction

On January 22, 2018, a message wishing South Korean President Moon Jae-in a happy birthday flickered on an electronic billboard in New York's Times Square. It was a few days later after the President's supporters displayed billboards in several Seoul subway stations and planned gatherings in multiple cities of South Korea, such as Seoul, Incheon, Daegu, Daejeon, Busan, and Jeju, to celebrate his first birthday since taking office (Lee, 2018; Persio, 2018). To join in on the celebration, Korean-Americans created a billboard in Times Square, which read: "Thank you for being our President; we are so blessed to have a President as splendid as you." A two-and-a-half minute video highlighted President Moon's political career and Korean-American supporters of all ages.

Unlike the domestic gatherings and billboards, which were rarely highlighted by any media, this peculiar billboard, a happy birthday wish to the South Korean President in one of the busiest places in New York City, drew tremendous attention. Fan-sponsored billboards to promote K-pop singers in Times Square were not uncommon, but a billboard of the Korean President was a first. Among the mixed reactions of excited approval and contemptuous disapproval, the response of the South Korean alt-right community, Ilbe, was remarkable: the community launched a billboard sign against the previous one in the exact same spot of Times Square within a week.

Highly developed digital media technology has altered our lives and experiences to various degrees. In the current digital era, as Castells (1996) notes, online communities are virtual and, at the same time, real. They are virtual in that they do not exist in physical spaces. People interact with others virtually; yet, these interactions among people can still be real. As people have come to depend heavily on digital media communication, such an obscure distinction between online and offline has become even more blurred than ever before. An example is the event above: it shows the process of how a digital confrontation between groups of different political perspectives has extended the ideological battlefield to offline space. With the case study of a South Korean online community, this research examines how people extend their online discourse to beyond the virtual community, and how they utilize offline venues to grow their base of supporters as a form of social movement. In particular, by highlighting the alt-right community's online interaction and offline activities, this study focuses on 1) how the Ilbe online community users facilitated online discussions in order to lead to offline social action; 2) why the Ilbe members created the advertisement in Times Square; and 3) what the implications are of the billboard within political and social contexts. In so doing, the researcher aims to clarify the meaning of space, both in digital and offline realms, in terms of influencing people's perceptions and mobilizing their social action to express their opinions.

The Alt-Right Community and Ilbe

The liberation of information has accounted for one of the most advantageous aspects of the Internet. Whereas people had been exposed to only limited amounts of news by the media before the Internet, anyone can obtain various types of information online. Yet, the accessibility of abundant information via the Internet has turned out to be a double-edged sword. People obtain not only diverse news perspectives, but also conspiracy theories and fake news (Barkun, 2003; Wilson, 2018). The introduction of incorrect and/or biased information has led readers to construct "alternative" realities. In particular, the audience for conspiracy theories has often tended to incorporate ideas of right-wing authoritarians (Altemeyer, 2004). Given that they have interacted with others who share similar worldviews and beliefs, and that they have

sustained significant parts of their social lives online, they have begun to create particular types of online communities; that is, alt-right groups.

The alt-right, short for "alternative right," refers to a far-right movement based online. The ideology of these alt-right groups can be summarized by white nationalism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and anti-multiculturalism (Lyons, 2017; Neiwert, 2017; Michael, 2017; Nagle, 2017). Many media scholars have begun to pay attention to the advent of the right-groups since the late 2000s. As their presence became prominent after the 2016 Presidential election in the United States (US), researchers have focused on political trolls and their motivations to participate in the online communities, and their tactics used (Coleman, 2014; Matias, 2016; Southern Poverty Law Center; 2016). Scholars have highlighted how several online communities, such as 4chan and 8chan, have become cyberplaces where members of alt-right groups can exercise their influence (Neiwert, 2017; Michael, 2017). Previous research has indicated the characteristics of alt-right groups as the following: a strong Internet presence accompanied with trolling; sophisticated use of digital technologies; and unique communication via utilizing memes. Moreover, judging by their trolling comments, alt-right group members' attitudes and worldviews towards their surroundings are often "highly ethnocentric, fearful of a dangerous world, aggressive, dogmatic, and inclined to extreme self-righteousness and poor reasoning" (Neiwert, 2017, p. 6). Combining the mindset to secure traditional values with their political inclination toward right-wing parties, alt-right groups' radical, political stances have been consolidated.

The emergence of alt-right groups has become a worldwide phenomenon. Research on such groups have been conducted not only in the US (Coleman, 2014; Matias, 2016; Neiwert, 2017), but also in European countries (Morstatter, Shao, Galstyan, & Karunasekera, 2018; Pirro, 2015). However, alt-right groups in East Asian countries have rarely been studied as of yet. Given the fact that many Asian countries have enjoyed highly developed digital media technology (for example, South Korea has been one of the most wired nations in the world), it is necessary to understand how alt-right groups in Asian countries have interacted with others, and how they have developed their online discourses. In this sense, the current research focuses on one of the alt-right groups in East Asian countries, Ilbe Storehouse in South Korea.

Ilbe Storehouse (henceforth, Ilbe), a representative alt-right community of South Korea, was launched in 2010. It was originally created in order to store the 'daily popular' posts of another popular online community, DC Inside. A sub-forum of DC Inside, 'daily popular,' displays only selected posts that are recognized by its users. Since having a post in the sub-forum was considered to be an honor, it soon led to severe competition among the community members of DC Inside. Its users tended to post problematic threads with ethically inappropriate, abusive memes to draw their peers' attention. Such overheated competition to create provocative posts resulted in the site administrator's need to censor posts in the daily popular forum and delete questionable posts. To prevent the removal of their recognized posts, DC Inside users created a 'storehouse' for saving their threads forever. This was the start of Ilbe Storehouse. Here, Ilbe is short for Ilgan Best, which is Korean for 'popular daily.'

Considering the motives of how the community was launched, it is not surprising that the use of memes has played a significant role for Ilbe. The more sensational the meme is, the more respect its author earns from other users. Indeed, the development of this online community is parallel with that of 4chan in the United States. Ilbe started as an open forum to share funny memes and witty posts. Similar to 4chan's original success with memes, which drew a million hits, several memes on Ilbe have been highly popular among its members. Ilbe also became

known for its trolling. Targets of Ilbe have mainly been ethnic and regional minorities, females, and figures in the liberal political party. Ilbe has been known as a representative alt-right online community since the 2012 Korean Presidential election.

Neiwert (2017) summarizes 4chan as "a world dominated by digital trolls, insanely unbridled conspiracism, angry White-male-identity victimization culture, and ultimately, open racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic hatred, misogyny, and sexual/gender paranoia" (p. 4). The Ilbe community can be summarized with similar traits. Ilbe is a predominantly male-based online community. According to a self-initiated poll of 1,176 users in March 2013, 35 percent of all users are between the ages of 21 and 25 (Pearson, 2013). First, it is known for its hate speech against women. For example, one of the group's popular phrases, "kimchi bitch," refers to Korean women as gold diggers (Kasulis, 2017). Misogynistic posts have been one of the most popular topics in the community. Second, Ilbe users have shown strong hostility not only towards sexual minorities, but also ethnic minorities. They believe that there are certain groups of people who are superior to other groups in Korean society, that is, Korean men. They degrade anyone who may challenge their patriarchal authority. Third, the Ilbe community holds extreme right-wing political inclinations. Derived from their conservative political perspectives, the users refer to anyone who seems "pro-North Korea" or politically left as "commies" and denounce them with abusive memes and words.

Like 4chan, the Ilbe community is oftentimes a place where social norms, manners, and etiquette are considered as outdated hypocrisy, and its members focus only on trolling. Ilbe users have created several collages of various images, music themes, and words as memes. Some memes are borrowed from 4chan. Pepe the Frog is one of the most frequently used memes in the Ilbe community. In his analysis, Neiwert (2017) claims that alt-right groups utilize Pepe's meme not only because of the character's cuteness, but also because of its implication in a cultural context: irony. By using such memes, alt-right groups perceive themselves as "smarter and more sophisticated, [with] their rhetoric of racism, violence, and open eliminationism wrapped in more wit and humor, at least of a sort" (Neiwert, 2017, p. 9). Ilbe users have adopted both connotative and denotative meanings of several memes from 4chan. Additionally, they have created other images and ideas from the unique situation of South Korea. For example, they often mock the Gwangju Uprising (a mass protest against the South Korean military government in Gwangju between May 18 and 27, 1980), previous South Korean presidents from the liberal party, and North Korean leaders. The evolutionary process of Ilbe as an alt-right group is surprisingly similar to that of 4chan in the Unted States.

The Ilbe community has been able to exercise considerable influence over South Korean society, based on its large volume of users. According to a traffic analysis of the Ilbe community by SimilarWeb[1], it had 22.7 million visits and was the 24th most popular website in South Korea from January to June 2018. Whenever opinions are divided on particular issues, Ilbe has played a leading role in persuading the public to adopt right-wing perspectives. For example, the Ilbe community began to gain notoriety for its vocal support of the former President Park Geun-hye during her 2012 election campaign (Pearson, 2013). When she was impeached due to her political scandal and the liberal President Moon Jae-in was elected in March 2013, many older far-right supporters of Park decided to join the Ilbe community in order to "find solace in the bitter threads of Ilbe" (Kasulis, 2017). Although the far-rightists no longer have representation in the Blue house (the executive office and official residence of the

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[1] The traffic of the Ilbe community was estimated on March 2019 from
https://www.similarweb.com/website/ilbe.com.

South Korean President), the stance of the Ilbe community as an alt-right community has become more consolidated than before. In this sense, an examination of the community's online discourse and subsequent social movement outside the virtual space provides us with an understanding of the implications for how alt-right groups exercise their influence in society.

Public Space Itself Can Be a Symbolic Messenger

Lefebvre (2000) indicates that the globalization of capital has led to a shift from the production of commodities in space to the production of space itself. In particular, an "alternative calculus of use value" (Dirlik, 2001, p. 36) guides the projects of social change to appropriate abstract space and create meanings based on this space. There have been several studies on social movements and political actions related to public space. For example, Tiananmen Square was at the center of the May Fourth Movement (Lee, 2009); Boston for #Occupy Everywhere (Juris, 2012); and Taksim Square to save Gezi Park (Gül, Dee, and Cünük, 2014). Habermas (1996) notes that the public sphere, as "a network for communicating information and points-of-view" (p. 360) lies between the state and society. Here, physical space (Low & Smith, 2006) and media (Thompson, 2000) are some of the major components used to create the public sphere (Castells, 2008). With the advent of digital media technology, both the Internet and wireless communication networks have also become important factors (McChesney, 2007). Hence, when a cultural or political event happens within a physical space, and the mass media (including the Internet) distribute news to the public, space starts to be transformed as symbolic in nature.

People often plan social movements in the popular spots of a city in order to communicate the purpose of their actions in society: non-participants easily get to know what is going on and why it matters. Such movements can also quickly attract the media's attention. Most of the massive demonstrations in South Korea have been held in Gwanghwamun Square, one of the most popular tourist spots, as well as one of the busiest business districts of Seoul. Large groups of South Koreans have come together, holding candles in Gwanghwamun Square in order to express their opinions. Examples include the 2004 candlelight vigil that was held to protest the South Korean National Assembly's impeachment of President Roh, and the 2008 US beef protest, a series of demonstrations held after the South Korean government reversed a ban on US beef imports. Finally, there were the 2016-2017 candlelight vigils, in which more than a million people participated in a series of protests between October 2016 and March 2017 to urge for President Park's impeachment. On some occasions, South Korean diaspora members have also orchestrated multiple demonstrations and candlelight vigils related to the South Korean issues in their own cities, such as New York, Paris, London, and Los Angeles, to support their compatriots in South Korea. The worldwide 2016–2017 candlelight vigils serve as a representative example. Indeed, it is important to note that an individual social action has rarely been planned or taken outside the home country without any related local concurrence. Social actions inside and outside the country have occurred in tandem.

On the other hand, having billboard commercials is a different story in terms of promoting and advertising cultural products, including traditional customs, cities, and celebrities. Many South Korean-related commercials have been created and released external to South Korea, in particular, in New York City's Times Square. The first well-known case involved bibimbap commercials in 2010 and 2012. The South Korean publicist, Seo Kyoung-duk, and his team advertised bibimbap (a popular Korean dish made of steamed rice mixed with meat, vegetables and hot sauce) in a 60-second video (Chun, 2012). Since this commercial gained a great deal of attention from the media, diverse subsequent commercials followed. K-pop fans fund digital

billboards to promote their singers. According to a Forbes' article, such advertising has become "a full-scale, regularly occurring phenomena with fans from around the globe" to show their support, and 20–30 K-pop ad campaigns alone were displayed in Times Square in 2017 (Herman, 2017). One of the main reasons as to why people choose venues away from their own regions is the significance of the place as a public space. For example, Times Square is the most popular and expensive location in the United States for wide-scale ads. It is also one of the most well-known international tourist locations. Having an ad in such a place enables people not only to expect huge exposure to others who are not familiar with the topic, but also to deliver a meaningful message to the world. In this sense, a billboard in Times Square is understood as a way of sending a significant message to the world by its organizers and participants. It explains why fans are now more interested in having their ads in Times Square, even though similar ideas, such as purchasing ad space in subway stations, have been popular throughout Asia for years. Yet, it is still rare to find any such case related to politicians and political messages displayed in Times Square unless it is done for an election campaign. For this reason, when this unprecedented billboard appeared as a birthday wish for the South Korean President, its impact on the South Korean society was recognizable and worthy of study.

Research Questions and Methods

This research begins with the birthday ads for the South Korean President and the alt-right community's response to the commercial. The current President is not only a liberal party politician, but also is a close friend of the previously deceased President Roh, who was also a liberal party president. Fourteen months after finishing his term as president, Roh was suspected of bribery by prosecutors, and he committed suicide after saying that there were too many people suffering because of him. The Ilbe community has been notorious for its consecutive expression of hatred toward President Roh and its mockery of his suicide. Needless to say, its users have exhibited a hostile attitude toward the Moon administration. Within a week from the ad's release on January 22, 2018, the Ilbe community put up an impromptu billboard to countervail the previous ad in Times Square. By analyzing online discussions in the Ilbe community during the week of January 22, 2018 and the subsequent outcome (an impromptu billboard in Times Square), this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How did the Ilbe online community users facilitate online discussions in order to lead to offline social action?
2. Why did the Ilbe members create the advertisement in Times Square?
3. What are the implications of the billboard within political and social contexts?

The main research tool for this research is digital ethnography. Ethnography is a useful methodological tool used to explore complex links and to interpret culture (Geertz, 1973). Throughout a significant amount of time for observation and interaction, a researcher can provide a rich understanding and interpretation of what is going on within the field, and can decode the cultural meanings of a group's particular behavioral patterns, social customs, and norms.

With the advent of digital media, there have been trials to apply such a methodological approach to virtual communities. Digital ethnography can help researchers collect abundant amounts of data without moving from place to place. Despite its advantages, digital ethnography needs to be conducted carefully. Digital culture entails different types of social formation from the traditional, offline society (Hakken, 1999). This makes it difficult for researchers to find an appropriate site for research. It may also be hard to collect all of the

necessary data due to the features of digital communication – new information every minute; high user population volumes; and frequent changes in relevant topics. Given the features of digital communities, it is important for researchers to monitor online communities over a significant amount of time in order to analyze the online data in a timely and accurate manner (Sade-Beck, 2004; Jones, 1999). The researcher also needs to collect online data carefully because users can simply add, edit, or delete their messages. There is always the risk that only the active participants of the community are noticeable, who may not represent the majority of the group.

To maximize the benefits and to curtail the limitations of digital ethnography as a methodology, the current research has been tailored with respect to its research methods. After deciding on the Ilbe community as the research subject, the researcher endeavored to learn the specific jargons, memes, and issues that have been widely used in the community. Understanding the background and history of the Ilbe community in South Korean society enabled the researcher to capture the underlying contexts of online interactions within the community.

In order to encapsulate the consensus of the community, the researcher focused on one of the sub-forums in the Ilbe community entitled as "Ilbe." The Ilbe community has multiple sub-forums for politics, entertainment, anime, and celebrities, similar to 4chan. When a posting in any of Ilbe's forums receives a significant number of recommendations from other users, it moves to the "Ilbe" board automatically. It is considered as a special forum that has a higher rank than the other forums on Ilbe. Having a posting appear on the forum is thus considered as an honor among its users because it signifies widespread approval. Thus, this forum's postings indicate the topics and ideas that interest Ilbe users the most.

For this study, I collected all of the digital communication within the community from January 21, 2018, when news about the birthday wish billboard ad was first reported, to January 26, 2018, days after the Ilbe community's response ad was released and reported in South Korean media. Since the contents of the community is open to the public, I could easily access the threads and comments of the online community. According to Correll's (1995) typology of online community membership and participation, there are four different styles of participants: regulars, newbies, lurkers, and bashers. My observation style in the online community was close to that of a lurker. I did not participate in any activities or discussions in the community, but I did observe the users' interactions and activities. Since Ilbe is a representative alt-right community, it often promotes a one-sided perspective toward understanding social and political issues in South Korea. I tried to remain objective as a researcher in the process of collecting and analyzing the data from the community. I focused on the ways that Ilbe users developed their opinions as the dominant discourse within the community, and how they communicated these opinions to the outside community. There were approximately 250 postings associated with this topic on the board, and each posting included approximately 100 subsequent comments. Given that these comments represent how the Ilbe community members communicate and interact with one another, this research examines both the postings and the Ilbe community's subsequent comments.

This article consists of three analysis sections. First, the current research explores how the Ilbe online community confronted other groups with opposite political perspectives. This research also examines how the Ilbe community members initiated their ad event, how they responded to the pro-left-wing government advertisement, and how they developed their stance as an alt-right community to interpret the event. Second, this research demonstrates how the Ilbe community developed a relevant online discourse, turned it into social action, and justified the

action. Finally, the third section of this research elaborates the implications regarding the series of events and Times Square as the chosen venue for social action. It also articulates how public space plays a key role in delivering political messages to the public.

From Online Interaction to Digital War

The 2016–2017 South Korean political scandal that centered on President Park's relation with her old friend, Choi Soon-sil (in regard to abusing state power and leaks of classified information), has had a significant impact on South Koreans, both inside and outside South Korea (Lee, 2018). This massive social action not only resulted in President Park's impeachment, but also served as momentum for South Koreans to mobilize social change based on digital communication. Without the aid of digital media, the original idea of having candlelight vigils every Saturday afternoon to urge presidential impeachment would not have spread or continued for months. Digital media have even enabled South Korean diaspora members to join such movements. Overseas candlelight vigils in support of President Park's impeachment were orchestrated in 70 cities of 26 countries within a month (Im, 2017). As a result of witnessing the success of online-initiated social movements, South Koreans have actively used digital media to become involved in ongoing social and political issues.

South Korean netizens initially suggested the idea of putting up birthday-wish billboards as a way to show support for their new president on January 10, 2018 (Yoon, 2018). The original suggestion was to place ads in ten different subway stations in Seoul after fundraising the money for them. A day later, the users of Missyusa.com, a representative online community for South Korean American immigrant women, suggested launching a U.S. version of the ad in Times Square. In order to attract more people's attention, all of these processes, including raising money, creating a video clip, and contacting an advertising agency, were disclosed via online interaction – in particular Twitter. What is interesting here is that the Ilbe community rarely paid attention to news about these ads in the Seoul subway stations. Only four postings mentioned the ads. They complained about the project and laughed at the idea, but did not take the ads seriously at all. However, their nonchalant attitudes changed completely when they learned that South Korean American women were preparing to put up the ad in Times Square. Given the fact that President Moon has many female supporters and that the leading Twitter user names are feminine in nature, such as the Organic Wool Knitting Union[2], Ilbe's initial response postings and comments expressed hatred of women, then moved on to denounce the Moon administration. The Ilbe community members' threads before their response ad idea can be summarized as a mixture of misogyny, mockery of the left-wing president, and criticism of the current political situation in South Korea.

Many initial responses from Ilbe users targeted the project team. They belittled the participants of the project as "groupies" blindly following their idol. They did not see it as necessary to check on how many female participants were involved in the project. Assuming that women had created the project, their condemnation was aimed thoroughly at South Korean females.

> **2018.01.21**   21:33:34 We, 20s to 40s Korean males, need to be careful. We can see who supports the president and manipulates the media. The current government has been supported by these lunatics. There can't be any good policy made for men by this government.

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[2] The project participants created fake names to protect their private information.

2018.01.23	02:25:05 They are savages. I do not know what to say.
2018.01.23	03:26:23 It shows why we cannot stop blaming Korean bitches. They are so unreasonable.
2018.01.23.	05:12:18 Females in their 30s and 40s are, in particular, a terror. They have no brains.
2018.01.25	16:16:15 We need to deprive women's voting right.
2018.01.23	12:25:01 They are always like that. They probably followed H.O.T., and Shinhwa [K-pop boy groups], and now the president.

As briefly mentioned above, the Ilbe community is very well known for its misogyny (Kasulis, 2017). One of the few rules that Ilbe has is to ban female users within the community. Even if there are female users, they are not supposed to "come out" openly as females. Ilbe users sometimes called one another "bitches" for the purpose of humiliating them. In this light, when Ilbe users found out that an ad as a birthday wish for the South Korean president would be put up in Times Square, they blamed this action as one of the typical behaviors of females – irresponsible and emotional. Numerous threads elaborated on how emotional and unreasonable South Korean females are. They argued that South Korean females are unable to evaluate what the important political issues are, so these ignorant voters elected and followed the left-wing president just like girls who admire their idols unconditionally. Such an argument led them to solidify their disapproval of Moon's administration. Their resentment about losing the former conservative President Park as well as the distrust of the subsequent liberal government often went hand in hand.

2018.01.23	12:29:39 This is why Korea is so messed up.
2018.01.23	13:11:55 This is the difference. We, the right-wing, do not do that.
2018.01.23	15:17:47 The current president is not a rightfully elected one. These lunatics did not know what they had done.
2018.01.23	14:13:57 The bitches messed up not only their husbands or boyfriends, but also this country.
2018.01.24	11:02:42 The whole project might be planned by the government. Who would do that, spending their money?

The Ilbe community shares many similarities with 4chan in the United States. Yet, Ilbe's roots and popularity stem from a unique South Korean political situation. For example, they pay homage to the former conservative presidents Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, while criticizing the former liberal presidents Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Ilbe users evaluate President Park Chung-hee, father of the impeached President Park, and President Chun Doo-hwan, a former South Korean army general who ruled as an unelected coup leader, as great leaders who brought forth South Korea's economic development in the 1970s and 1980s. Their years of dictatorship have hardly been of concern for Ilbe users. Rather, the Ilbe community gives more weight to economic aspects than any other sectors in South Korean society. A part of the reason for this concern is that unsecure economic conditions are critical problems for millennials, who comprise the majority of the community.

Rising youth unemployment and economic hardship have been significant issues in South Korean society. The Ilbe community has argued that the conservative party knows best how to

handle economics. Ironically, it became even worse during the conservative President Park's administration with rocketing unemployment rates. According to an analysis by Statistics Korea, South Korea topped the list with the sharpest growth in youth unemployment among the 21 member countries of the OECD in 2017 (Kim, 2017). Thus, the neologism, Hell Joseon, was created to describe the difficulties faced by young South Koreans in 2014. It is a satirically coined word, joining both *hell* and *Joseon* (the last dynasty of Korea). The term was initially used online, but was later mentioned in the media. Finally, it was used as a keyword to indicate the failure of the Park administration during the 2016–2017 candlelight vigils.

Admitting that South Koreans had been living in "Hell Joseon," Ilbe users claimed that changing the ruling party did not improve socioeconomic conditions at all; in fact, they maintained that conditions became even worse with the liberal president. They complained that the unchanging dismal economic index proves how unqualified the president is. Nevertheless, they believed that President Moon is elected because of female voters.

Given that President Moon has tried to develop a good relationship with the North Korean leader, a series of comments and posts accused the president's supporters of being either "commies" or "North Korean spies."

> **2018.01.21**   22:43:13 They need to go back to North Korea.

> **2018.01.21**   19:28:33 Once we censor these tweets, more than hundreds of North Korean spies will be captured.

> **2018.01.23**   13:18:29 They like North Korea. Why do they want to have the ad in the U.S., instead of North Korea?

Such comments show Ilbe's stance as an alt-right community that has been for diligent defenders of traditional, conservative values and right-wing political perspectives. Its members share a distinctive binary choice that distinguishes *us* from *them*. In particular, supporters of the Moon administration are considered as *them*, or even worse, enemies associated with North Korea. As a result, they considered the ad, promoting the South Korean government in such a well-known global city, as a critical threat to their beliefs. It encouraged them to take corresponding action.

Invisible Participants, Tangible Media in a Global City
Within three days after the billboard's appearance in Times Square, an interesting post was uploaded in the Ilbe's daily best forum. An Ilbe user wrote that he created a counter ad with a video clip critical of the previous birthday ad, that it would soon be released in the same location of Times Square. Approximately six hundred comments followed this post.

> **2018.01.25**   12:06:06 It is about the upcoming ad in Times Square. I understand that many of you think it is a lie. But I can assure you that it is not a lie. If any of you live in New York City, please go and take a picture of the ad.

Ilbe is not just an alt-right community, but also a humor forum (at least it was the initial purpose of the online community), so spurious posts are not uncommon. Many Ilbe users were not sure whether the post was credible. In particular, when the post said that the ad would be released in Times Square, it was difficult for the majority of the community members to verify it with their own eyes.

2018.01.25   12:07:38 Yeah, I want to believe you. But I don't think so.

2018.01.25   12:10:14 I am sure somebody will be there to see whether it is true. But, what if all of this is just fake?

2018.01.25   12:09:48 I don't believe you until I see its picture.

2018.01.25   12:40:44 So it will be 2:05 p.m. in Korean time. I really hope somebody will be there.

2018.01.25   13:30:47 Tell me how much you paid for the ad first.

From the advance notice to the moment when the ad appeared as one of the billboards in Times Square, hundreds of threads were generated within the community. Most of them were skeptical. Right after the expected release time of the ad, several posts were uploaded with pictures of the ad in Times Square by Ilbe users living in New York City. The ad was real. It used one of their notorious memes, an image mocking the former President Roh Moo-hyun. The message on the screen stated, "Happy birthday 'Roh-ala.' We love you. Happy Un-ji Day." The images and phrases used in the ad could only be understood by Ilbe users, because it was full of jargons and memes. Soon, the atmosphere of the community reached an obvious turnaround from anger and frustration to excitement and triumph.

2018.01.25   14:56:10 Thank you.

2018.01.25   14:59:26 I respect you.

2018.01.25   15:03:28 You are a true patriot.

2018.01.25   15:28:41 The Ilbe community is always right. We are in the center of this nation.

2018.01.25   20:18:17 MAKE ILBE GREAT AGAIN

2018.01.26   05:22:08 You are a true patriot. I respect you.

Whereas they blamed the previous birthday ad in Times Square as a waste of money, as well as a national disgrace, they evaluated the counter ad as a brave, patriotic action against leftists. Their understanding was thoroughly based on the clear dichotomy between the right versus the left wing. They enjoyed the subsequent media attention towards the ad, and wondered whether the international media mentioned the event as well:

2018.01.25   14:39:19 Are there any related international news reports?

2018.01.25   14:40:01 What about the Times? Did it mentioned about us?

Needless to say, after the mockery ad was reported in news media, an intense confrontation developed between the Ilbe community and President Moon's supporters. What is noteworthy here is that there were not any identifiable individuals in this online turmoil, which lasted several days. Along with the ban on female users and their coming out in the community, there is another strict rule in Ilbe: anonymity. Its users cannot exchange personal information with one another in order to prevent members from making friendships within the community. Moreover, the users tend not to reveal their identities (as Ilbe users) to outsiders due to their abusive comments among fellow Ilbe members, and their notoriety in the larger society. Thus, even though Ilbe users referred to the person who put up the counter ad as "a national hero" or

"a great patriot," no one knew who that person actually was. Additionally, the members of the initial birthday wish ad project team did not disclose their personal information online, either. This team started the project online via Twitter and the online community, missyUSA.com. Their personal information remained hidden.

When there were heated discussions between the two different communities, Ilbe and the initial project team members, there was no one who had concrete information. No matter how intense the discussion and criticism were toward one another online, these have served as extensions of the digital war between two contrasting groups, conservatives and liberals, since the 2016 Korean political scandal. Nothing was tangible, except for the ads displayed in Times Square: there was no one who went out in the streets to make his or her voice heard. Moreover, people outside these online communities could only see the ads, which were displayed 6,877 miles away from Seoul. An Ilbe user described this scenario as their battle field, which had moved from online forums such as Naver [One of the biggest Korean online search engines, such as Google] to New York City. Consequently, the ads had significant impacts on the participants of the digital war in various ways. Based on an analysis of the numerous threads and comments, the most crucial factor that led to such a significant impact on the online community was the symbolic meaning of the space where all of these events occurred – Times Square in New York City.

A Global City Makes Us Global
The Ilbe users did not pay much attention to domestic ads. However, the subsequent ads in Times Square made them react with a series of counter activities. Ilbe members no longer regarded this ad as a one-time event; rather, it was seen as a "national shame" and a "critical threat to the right wing." It did not matter to them that the Times Square ad was shown only for several minutes so that its exposure time to the public would be significantly less, compared to the subway station ads in South Korea. Notwithstanding, the Ilbe users considered where the ads were displayed as the most significant factor.

    2018.01.21   20:22:43 People who planned it are criminal.

    2018.01.25   13:08:35 It is a national crisis.

    2018.01.23   02:33:26 Why in the U.S.?

    2018.01.23   07:23:58 The commies wants to harm the relationship between Korea and the U.S.

    2018.01.23   13:07:01 Americans will be confused whether it is for either South Korea or North Korea.

These comments show how members of this alt-right group perceived the event. The United States has been considered as a powerful ally that can destroy their enemies, including communists and people who are pro-North Korea, for alt-right groups in South Korea. When there are alt-right group demonstrations in South Korea, their members hold up the national flags of South Korea and the United States to show that they strongly support the South Korea-U.S. alliance (Ock, 2019). In this sense, they connected the ads supporting the left-wing president in New York City with the concern or threat that diplomatic relations between South Korea and the United States might become shaky. The Ilbe users did not find such an interpretation as a breach of logic; rather, they felt the urge to react to this initial ad promptly.

One of the major reasons for such a reaction is based on the symbolic meaning of Times Square, which had only been known to South Koreans as a highly popular tourist attraction with numerous musicals and shows. When Samsung installed its billboard in Times Square in 1992, this locale also became known as "the center of advertising across the world" and "the crossroads of the world" (Yonhap News, 1992). Furthermore, a series of bibimbap ads in 2010 made people aware of Times Square as a place where significant messages to the world can be delivered (Koh, 2010). In this sense, Ilbe users perceived the initial birthday ad as "a national shame," based on their understanding that Times Square represents "pride as the center of the world." Such an attitude is derived from the symbolic status and power that the mass media have given to Times Square. It is also reflected in the series of threads in Ilbe after their counter ad was released in Times Square.

> **2018.01.25**   14:12:11 Ilbe is so global.
>
> **2018.01.25**   14:14:59 It feels like we are in the center of the world.
>
> **2018.01.25**   16:04:03 So this is the power of Ilbe. We are the ones who truly support our country.
>
> **2018.01.25**   14:32:58 We are in the center of the world indeed.

The most commonly used words in these threads were "global," "center," and "power." While replaying the ad in Times Square via YouTube, many Ilbe users expressed excitement and satisfaction. They praised the fact that one of their representative, abusive memes was displayed in the United States. This finding indicates that significant features of alt-right groups, such as using abusive memes to deliver their messages in unforgettable ways, are still applied outside their community. Since this event happened not on the computer screen, but in one of the busiest areas in the world, Ilbe members saw it as a powerful moment for them.

Taking it one step further, the meaning they granted to the public space where the ads were put up was not limited to Times Square, as the online discussion went further. They tended to interpret these ads in the United States as an ideological confrontation between the right and left wing. Their endless, ideological confrontations with anonymous "commies" were finally dragged out of the digital world, and even better, in front of their powerful ally, the United States. In this light, they repeatedly displayed pictures and video clips of the ad in Times Square for days. An anonymous user even said that he witnessed the birth of "a myth for the new Ilbe" (Ilble, 2018).

Only a few members could see the ads in Times Square with their own eyes, while others were waiting for related pictures and news updated online in South Korea. Moreover, the advertising agency that helped put up the mockery ads published a public apology several days later, as South Korean American immigrants complained about the ad's use of abusive memes. Yet, the Ilbe community still considered the series of the events as their "victory" against irrational groupies in the center of the world.

It is, indeed, interesting to note that major discussions were conducted online as usual. Yet, the events in late January of 2018 virtually translocated all of the participants from South Korea to the United States. Through the billboard ad in Times Square, the president's supporters declared their love and support toward the current South Korean government, while the Ilbe community members reinforced and reconfirmed their political stance as an alt-right online community. In this process, Times Square played a key role as a significant public space that generated various meanings for both sides.

Conclusion

One of the most distinctive changes that the development of digital media has brought is that the world has become more ubiquitous, and the boundaries between online and offline have been eroded. Online communication and interaction began to get involved in real-world politics. It is not rare for online communities to mobilize social movements outside the virtual society. Tarrow (1998) defines social movement as "sequences of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames, and which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents" (p. 2). Thus, it may not be an exaggeration to say that various levels of social movement happen daily online. An online community based on similar beliefs and values often shares the same political perspectives, and easily motivates its users to create various types of collective action. An interesting example involves the events related to the case discussed in this article. It provides us with a great opportunity to examine contemporary digital culture within the alt-right community, as well as to witness how a digitally initiated conflict developed into offline social action.

The findings of this research demonstrate how faithfully the Ilbe community performs its role as a representative alt-right community in South Korea. Their comments, mixed with misogyny and ultra-conservativism, show their current stance in South Korean society. This research also shows how social action can be mobilized based on online communication. When there is a triggering event, online community users engage in social action quickly to express their political preferences and opinions. Even though there is no one who actually goes in the streets to make his or her voice heard, tangible media products start to substitute for this role. The participants of this case study confronted invisible others who disagreed with their perspectives and the worldviews embedded in their ads. Indeed, this scenario represents a digital war for its participants, who continuously asserted their political beliefs, even though outsiders could never recognize who they were.

The selection of the location for the ads made the events and following confrontations even more serious. For the participants, Times Square was not merely considered as an effective place to advertise. In particular, the Ilbe members tended to identify Times Square with the entire American nation. From the stance of the alt-right group in South Korea, which values the US as a strong ally to defeat their enemies (communists and the left wing), the Ilbe community members saw the release of their ad in Times Square as a victory in their digital ideological battle.

By closely examining this recent digital confrontation among online communities in South Korea, this project yields insights into understanding the current social movements based on digital media, and in particular, an alt-right group. It contributes to multiple fields of scholarships. First, this research enables us to enrich scholarly discussions regarding the alt-right community outside Western societies. Second, this research explores the relations between the digital world and physical space. Furthermore, it also presents how symbolic meanings within a public space direct and influence heated online discourse. Previous studies have focused on how digital interactions have changed the binary choice between virtual and physical space. Alternatively, this study suggests that pre-existing meanings and understandings of public space force us to blur the boundaries between the online and offline spheres.

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The Internet and Activists' Digital Media Practices:
A case of the Indigenous People of Biafra Movement in Nigeria

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Abstract

Previous studies have highlighted some important contributions that participants' digital activism play in the process of protest coordination and mobilisation. The literature suggests that individuals' digital practices contribute to the dynamism of social movements' actions for social and political change. Across Africa, there is limited literature examining how social actors use the internet or the variations in the use of the internet for socio-political activism. While many studies focused on leaderless mass actions across the world, few focused on social movement organisations, much less in Nigeria. Understanding of the variations in activist's digital media practices is thereby limited, with the dynamics in the mobilising potentials of the internet in Nigeria under-explored. Second, most studies only focused on the empowering effects of the internet as the main variable, ignoring the concomitant impacts of activists' media such as radio in the mobilisation efforts of social movements in Africa. This article attempts to fill this gap, by examining variations in IPOB protesters' digital media practices and their levels of involvement in the Biafra independence struggle. The article aims to understand protesters' digital support roles, motivations, constraints and sources of mobilising information. Using survey data (N = 113), the article argues that through protesters' digital media practices in the services of the IPOB protests, complemented with the pervasiveness of Radio Biafra ideological programmes, the idea of Biafra was constituted and made visible in the Nigerian public sphere. Implications of the internet as the only alternative media for African social movements are discussed.

Keywords: digital activism, IPOB movement, Internet, activist media, social movement, Biafra, Nigeria

Introduction

The Role of the Internet in Social Mobilisation
Studies have focused, extensively, on the role of the internet in social mobilisation. The literature suggests that individuals' digital practices contribute to the dynamism of social movements' actions for social and political change. In this sense, activists can utilize the spaces of the internet to contribute to the mobilising efforts of a social movement. Apart from offering alternative self-publication for social movements (Atton, 2004) and reducing the cost of coordination, the internet also facilitates diffusion and exposure to mobilising information (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Shirky, 2011). Hence, the internet expands the action repertoire of social movements (Earl & Kimport, 2011) by allowing for a dynamic synthesis between individual "self-mobilising" efforts and a social movement's mobilisation processes (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, the internet has tended to disrupt the hierarchical relationship associated with traditional "collective action" by taking up the characteristics of "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) explains that the idea of a "connective action" not only privileges personal expressions over organisational but also explains the multiplicity of entry points to social protest networks afforded by digital technologies. In other words, social protest networks emerge and evolve when people are connected by their overlapping concerns to a social cause via digitally mediated networks.

With the proliferation of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, the utility of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) including smart mobile phones has burgeoned considerably in protests movements. Across different urban occupations of large-scale movements such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, many studies have argued that digital media have played significant roles in the overall coordination and sharing of ideas in such protests (Howard & Hussain, 2011, 2013; Theocharis, Lowe, Van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) suggest that "digital media are enabling people to commit to an action and recommend it to others by sharing their personal participation stories, photos, or videos, and connect the largest population across time and space" (p.16). Thus, digital communication technology is offering a model of social mobilisation in which shared practices and action repertoire of large-scale movements transcend time, place, culture and issues (Diaz-Cepeda, Castañeda, & Andrade, 2018; McGarry, Jenzen, Eslen-Ziya, Erhart, & Korkut, 2019). For instance, in Turkey's Gezi protest, social media platforms such as Twitter helped in the emergence of a counter public sphere that mobilized attention to the protest (Göncü, Saka, & Sayan, 2018). Through production and dissemination of "bearing witness" videos, still images, music, and text on digital mediated networks by activists, the everyday manifestations of the protest were constituted and made visible (McGarry et al., 2019). Thus, digital media has become significant in turning social discontent into an organisational structure (Howard & Hussain, 2011).

While many of these studies focused on leaderless mass actions across the world, few focused on social movement organisations in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, thereby limiting the understanding of what ways activists in Africa are using the internet. For example, it is argued that the penetration of digital communication technologies in Nigerian society has provided multiple alternative entry points for Nigerian citizens to express their concerns, and add their voice to burning socio-political issues (Akinfemisoye, 2014; Iwilade, 2013). In particular, social media tools are offering a significant level of digital literacy to Nigerian citizens and activists groups, and the ability to utilize social media platforms to produce alternative media coverage (Akinfemisoye, 2014).

This article serves as an initial effort at examining the role that protesters' digital media practices played in the mobilization efforts of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement in Nigeria. It also highlights the complementarity and effectiveness of activist media such as the Radio Biafra service in the overall coordination and mobilization process. Activist's media denotes a special media through which activists deliver their messages to target audiences. As such, understanding the effectiveness of such medium in the IPOB movement's Biafra independence struggle will be interesting. In particular, the article focuses on four main issues: 1) the impacts of the internet in the IPOB movement; 2) the extent to which the internet is used to promote Biafran causes; 3) the levels of involvement of actors in promoting pro-Biafran causes on the internet and their support roles; 4) main motivating factor(s) and sources of movement's information and 5) the constraints of using digital media for pro-Biafran activism. The article asks:

1. What is the impact of the internet in the IPOB movement?
2. To what extent did participants engage in a range of digital media dissemination of protests manifestations?
3. What is the motivation for participating in the protest and through which media source are mobilising information received?
4. What is the constraint (s) of digital activism in the context of the IPOB movement?

Background

The political role of the press in Africa and Nigeria in particular vis-à-vis the contemporary activities of alternative journalism has been that of social political interventionism (Skjerdal, 2012). Journalism in Nigeria has remained in the form of protest – from contesting the authority of colonial order and demanding self-rule, to becoming a political instrument of class struggle, political manoeuvring, and a tool for inter-ethnic competition for power and authority (Bamiduro, 1982; Olayiwola, 1991; Oso, 2012). With its history of agitation and culture of dissent, the Nigerian press, which predate the formation of the Nigerian state, set the tone and tenor of group struggles and campaigns such that seemed to deepen the inter-group/geo-ethnic fault line in the Nigerian public sphere. Although the newspapers – which was largely privately owned – championed the rights of Nigerians to a certain degree, they were a potent political weapon in the hands of their owners (Adesoji & Alimi, 2012).

The return to civil rule in 1999 opened up more avenues for media owners to champion geo-ethnic interest in the contest for, and distribution of, national resources. This opened up the public space and unleashed a host of hitherto suppressed and dominant ethnic forces in the country (one of which is the reverberation of pro-Biafra independence struggles in the eastern part of Nigeria). The expanded "democratic" space saw the emergence of ethno-nationalists and ethnic militia groups, "with each group staking its claims and seeking to re-assert its identity in the struggles against perceived exclusion from access to power and resources" (Onuoha, 2012 p. 29). In all of these crises, the Nigerian media played overlapping roles of escalation and resolution (Adebanwi, 2004); either exaggerating the crises at some point and/or misinforming or undermining important issues about the crises and the people (Chiluwa, 2011). In many cases, they have maintained the position of political bourgeoisies, thereby reducing the faith of the people in the watchdog role that the mass media are supposed to play.

Consequently, the advent of the internet has been one of the most exciting moments in Nigerian democracy. Not only did it redefine the process of information dissemination and consumption,

it became an important platform for civil society mobilisation; ushering in a new dimension of political activism in the Nigerian public sphere. According to InternetWorldStats (2019), Nigeria has 55.5% internet penetration as at December 2018, with over 111.6 million internet users. The Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) reported that the number has marginally increased to 113.8 million as at January 2019 (Leadership, 2019). According to data from the 2018 edition of the Inclusive Internet Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Nigeria ranks number one for internet affordability in Africa and 17th globally (Awosanya, 2018). On the overall ranking for inclusive internet, the data suggests that Nigeria is 4th, with South Africa, Morocco and Egypt topping the continent's list in that order. Nevertheless, the affordances of the internet among increasingly literate Nigerians has increased political participation and awareness thus revolutionising social-political mobilisation and activism. As the mass media tries to wield its agenda setting powers, the audience have found solace in the interactivity of the internet through social networking sites to not only engender diversified views of national issues, but provide platforms which enable them to set agenda for the mass media practitioners.

The first notable event marking the empowering effect of the internet in Nigeria was the 2012 anti-subsidy protest – tagged #Occupy Nigeria movement (Akinfemisoye, 2013; Hari, 2014). The protest followed the government's announcement of a 100% increase in the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) from 65 naira (eqv. 0.18USD) to 141 naira (eqv. 0.39USD). Nigerian citizens took to the streets of major cities but also occupied social media. The #occupy Nigeria hashtag trended on Twitter and Facebook, as well as among other social networking sites and blogs, stimulating discussion on issues that spread beyond fuel subsidy removal to include broader issues of corruption and accountability in the governance of the country (Hari, 2014). The campaign caused the Nigerian government to review its policy on subsidy for petroleum products, leading to a reduction of the hike in the price of fuel (Endong, 2019). Furthermore, the kidnap of over 250 Chibok school girls by Islamist group Boko Haram in 2014, marked another example of digital activism in Nigeria, with #BringBackOurGirls campaigners using the internet to mobilize international support and awareness. Amongst social groups currently taking advantage of the internet for social activism is the IPOB movement.

The IPOB movement is one of the most prominent pro-Biafran movements in Nigeria seeking to break away from Nigeria and form an independent nation of Biafra. This plan is not new. On May 30, 1967, Igbo leaders declared a Biafran state, which led to a brutal civil war that ended on January 15, 1970 (Onuoha, 2018). Nevertheless, the idea of Biafra separatism has continued to ferment, leading to several secessionist movements in the past. The IPOB is currently the most prominent movement in the line of movements taking up the cause. The movement wants the Nigerian government to organize a referendum in the style of the British Brexit referendum, to determine whether the people of Biafra still want to remain in the union of One-Nigeria (Nwofe, 2017). Between 2015 and 2017, the movement was highly successful in organising protests in Nigeria as well as among the diaspora following the arrest and incarceration of its leader, Mr Nnamdi Kanu (BBC, 2018; Tayo, 2017). Prior to his incarceration, Mr Kanu, through the internet and his Radio Biafra FM transmissions from London, repudiated in strong words the alleged lop-sidedness of Nigeria's socio-political structures, double standards and lawlessness (Freeman, 2017). The arrest of Mr Kanu exacerbated pro-Biafra consciousness among the ethnic Igbos. In 2016, more than 150 peaceful protestors were killed on a Biafra Memorial Day, following a "chilling campaign of extrajudicial executions and violence" by the Nigerian military (Amnesty International, 2016). In September 2017, the Nigerian military launched *Operation Python Dance II* wherein dozens

of activists were arrested, tortured and killed extra-judicially, amidst condemnations (Adigun, 2018; Ilozue, 2018; TheEagleOnline, 2017). The movement's heavy reliance on the internet to bring to light evidence of political marginalisation, military brutality and hatred resonate within its constituency, where prominent politicians and stakeholders began to identify and lend their influence to the movement in order to retain their legitimacy with the people (Nwofe & Goodall, 2019). In this article, I argue that through protesters' digital media activities, complemented by the pervasiveness of Radio Biafra ideological content, the ideologies of Biafra were constituted and made visible; attracting the attention of international rights groups and stakeholders.

Digital Media Activities in Protest Movements
The rapidly changing digital media environment is changing the dynamics of collective actions and social change across many societies. The growth of relatively inexpensive digital communication technologies has enabled actors to occupy positions of influence beyond traditional intermediaries (such as government and mainstream media outlets), resulting in new capabilities for exchanges of information and opinions between collective action organizers and interested publics (Seo, 2019). Bennett, Segerberg, and Walker (2014) argue that digital media allows activists and their supporters to instigate shared grievances, form collective identities, and coordinate protest activities with different degrees of peer-peer production, knowledge, skills, and commitment. In many countries of Africa such as Nigeria, analysis of the role of digital media in social mobilisation are still anecdotal, limiting the knowledge about variations of activists' digital media practices in protest movement. Many studies have reported various dimensions through which digital media is enabling individuals to contribute to social mobilisation in protest movements. Earl (2010) argues that the internet allows protest planners to dramatically amplify their outreach efforts, to mobilize a wider audience more quickly and more cheaply. According to Lee and Chan (2015), this can be achieved when actors are able to take "a participation leadership" role, by making people around them participate in the activity of a movement (p. 880). This concept, the authors argue, does not necessarily mean that people must hold a formal position in a movement to exert their influence; it embodies the contribution of anyone that can influence other people's participation decision. Thus, individuals can contribute to the mobilisation process by way of reinterpreting grievances; re-creating meaning, expressing support roles, involvement, and encouraging other people within their digital media network to join. Others can conduct different types of digital activities including dispelling rumours, contributing mobilisation information and expanding the scale of awareness in the digital public sphere (Lee & Chan, 2016). Similarly, Castells (2015) noted that the ability of social movement actors to invent alternative interest and values, by developing an autonomous network of horizontal communication, helps set a new programme of resistance and social change. By occupying the medium and creating the message, he argues, citizens set out a new programme of their lives with materials of their suffering, fears, dreams and hopes that can strengthen public interest and commitment to collective action. Such unlimited spaces of interaction enabled by the internet have created a new communication system: "mass self-communication" (Castell, 2009, p. 70), which has the potential to make possible unlimited diversity and autonomous production of a communication flow that can construct meaning in the public's mind.

More recent studies have shown that individuals' social media activities can provoke large-scale protests in unprecedented ways (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; Bohdanova, 2014; Howard & Hussain, 2011; McGarry et al., 2019). In this argument, activists and protest participants can play roles that are more active in mobilisation processes. In their study of Gezi Park protest in Istanbul, McGarry et al. (2019) demonstrate that activists' visual documentation

of protest manifestations communicates the idea of solidarity whereby people who cannot be present have the capacity to share in the struggle through any way possible. Harlow's 2012 study of the Guatemalan Justice Movement, found that "users' protest-related and motivational comments, in addition to their use of links and other interactive elements of Facebook," helped mobilized participation to offline protest (p.225). Similarly, Lim (2013) showed that part of the success of the Tunisian uprising in 2010/11 was the connective structure of "individuals who sought more personalized paths to contribute to the movement through digital media" (p. 921). For example, in Egypt, a Facebook page: "We Are All Khaled Said" started by a local Google Executive, Wael Ghonim, became a logistical tool that mobilized the marginalized voices to urban spaces against Mubarak (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p. 38). According to Olesen (2013), apart from the horrifying cell phone photograph of Said posted on the web by his family, the creative appropriation of Said into existing injustice frames in Egypt by protesters strategically universalized the case. In their survey of 1,200 participants in Egypt's Tahrir Square protests, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) found that half of the participants had produced and disseminated protest images, playing journalistic roles. Bohdanova's analysis of the Ukrainian's Euromaidan Movement (2014) suggests that activists' digital activities were amplified by traditional outlets and helped increase the visibility of the movement and promote its message abroad. Moreover, Penney and Dadas (2014)'s study of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement found that the relay of pre-existing material online enabled activists on Twitter to build and sustain a geographically dispersed, networked counter-public that can articulate a critique of power outside of the parameters of mainstream media. Such a dynamic digital communication practices serve as a "stitching" platform that connects and convert different aspects of peer production into a formidable organisational network that is utilized across the crowd (Bennett et al., 2014).

What is most theoretically relevant about digitally networked activism is the phenomenon of scaling-up of action frames, and collective behaviour itself through networks, with or without the participation of organisations. Accordingly, communication among actors, citizens and interested parties themselves constitutes a central mechanism for mobilisation (Jenkins, 2019). Therefore, activists' digital posting of videos and text tends to create visual or textual spectacles that add emotional and human angle dimensions to the protest, attracting needed attentions and conveying multiple interpretations (Kim, 2019). In this article, I argue that the extent to which IPOB protesters use the internet to promote Biafran struggle relates to their level of involvements and commitments to the pro-Biafra cause. I argue that such digital media activism helped to maintain the momentum and legitimacy of Biafra ideology in Nigerian public sphere.

Protest Motivation and the IPOB Movement
Despite the richness of the literature on digital activism and protest participations, few studies have analysed how activists are motivated to participate in protest movements (Suwana, 2019). People can be motivated by different factors including organisation-prompted behaviour, socially-prompted behaviour or based on self-prompted behaviour (Bimber, 2017). Organisation-prompted behaviour is that in which a decision to participate is prompted by a request of a mobilising organisation. Such an organisation may have cultivated involvement overtime through a relationship with citizens. Socially-prompted motivation is when people decide to participate because they are aware others are doing so. In other words, the organisation has activated the network, such that an individual sees the actions of others but not the request or strategy of the mobilizer (Bimber, 2017). Self-directed prompt may best explain personal motivation based on political efficacy, knowledge or exposure or the idea that participation will change the status quo (Bimber, 2017; Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017).

Overall, organisational prompted participation begs the question of the type of message that motivated citizens. From that perspective, the media used by social movements can be important channels of disseminating tailored messages to prospective supporters. Social movement media are target specific, which means that they espouse content that not only resonates with their target audience but also promote their ideological stance. Such "activist media" as described by Waltz (2005) is used to propagate raw facts that would ordinarily be edited by the mainstream media. Like all forms of communication, Waltz argues that activist media responds to the social situations they are produced in, including overt and covert repression. In Africa, motivation to participate in a protest may simply be powered by people and the socio-political and economic conditions of their lives including marginalisation, injustices, exclusion, inequalities, impunity and corruption (Bohler-Muller & Van der Merwe, 2011; Jost, Becker, Osborne, & Badaan, 2017). For participants in the IPOB movement protest, it is quite likely that a general sense of exclusion and deprivation, reinforced by Radio Biafra programmes may have motivated participants.

The Internet and IPOB's Alternative Media: The Radio Biafra Service
Studies have argued that radio technology represents a unique alternative form of a movement's media (Atton, 2015; Leung, 2015). In the digital age, social movements can establish a "pirate radio," which operate both online and in physical spaces. A pirate radio station is a radio station that operates without a valid licence. In some cases, pirate radio can be legal where the signals are transmitted but illegal where the signals are received, especially where the signals cross national boundaries. Radio Biafra transmits from London and is received across the world including Nigeria. In Nigeria, the federal government considers it illegal and made several attempts to jam its signals (Premium Times, 2015; Usman, 2015). However, as the radio operates with satellite and internet, it is difficult to jam. People had alternative ways of listening to it. With the convergence associated with digital technologies, a pirate radio station can set up an interactive news website, offer programmes on demand through podcasting and live audio streaming as well as downloadable features (Mabweazara, 2015). Such interactive platform serves as a "safe haven" for the amplification of "rebel voice" in the face of tightening political control of mainstream media (Leung, 2015, p. 196).

Radio technology is essentially an "Africa's medium" due to its ability to transcend the barriers of cost, geographical boundaries, the colonial linguistic heritage and low literacy levels (Mano, 2012). Thus, radio can become a very effective means of mass education and mobilisation, and, with the proliferation of digital technologies such as smart mobile phones, radio can increasingly be associated with "deterritorialized", a transnational alternative public sphere opening up platforms of audience participation. Significantly, the orality associated with radio programmes is crucial to the audience in the African continent as it replicates and extends the already existing oral culture which forms the base of the society (Mare, 2013; Moyo, 2013).

Unfortunately, social movement scholars have not been able to analyse the connection between the internet and social movement's media such as radio in terms of their complementarity in mobilising protest movement. As we will see in this article, there is evidence to suggest that a movement's media can be an effective tool for disseminating ideologically focused messages that mobilize participation and support to its cause. Combining such activist media with the potentials of the internet will favour social movements greatly, especially in its ability to bridge the gap associated with various forms of digital divides but also in sustaining the ideological strengths of its target audience.

Method

Sample
A survey of the IPOB movement's protestors across six main Nigerian states was undertaken over different occasions of their protest marches between January 2016 to July 2017 in the following order: January 18, 2016 (Aba), February 9, 2016 (Enugu), May 30, 2016, (Onitsha), January 20, 2017 (Port Harcourt), July 24, 2017 (Ebonyi), and July 29, 2017 (Owerri).

Initially, the aim was to adopt a systematic sampling procedure wherein interviewers would work in pairs around the marching protesters and invite every fifth person, they walked past to be a respondent. This plan was changed as soon as the interviews began. The crowd that greeted the protest caused interruptions and participant anxiety. It is worth noting that this was a chaotic period of crackdowns and arrest of activists by the Nigerian secret services. Protesters organized themselves in a human shield as they matched down the road, making it difficult for any meaningful interactions to happen. As the organizers have no valid documentation of those in attendance it was difficult to ascertain the number of people in attendance. To overcome this situation, we utilized the services of informants who played a snowballing role by referring us to coordinators and protest organizers amongst the protesters. Selected respondents were issued with consent forms which detailed their rights and privileges and how the data would be used. The form also pointed to the anonymity of respondents, as we are aware of their security concerns.

A total of 20 respondents in each state was sampled, which amounts to 120 respondents for six states. While we do not claim that the resulting samples are representatives of either the larger population or the protest itself, the sampled participants are considered to be deeply involved in the pro-Biafran struggle and would be better motivated to share protest manifestations and promote the pro-Biafran objective more than those who are only online. To enhance safety, referred respondents were taken individually or in groups to semi-controlled public spaces such as parks, cafés and recreation centres near the protest ground where they filled in a copy of the questionnaire. Completed copies of the questionnaire were received on the spot by our team of interviewers. Overall, four participants declined their participation after they had been selected and three questionnaires were found to be empty during transcription. The fieldwork received a total sample of 113 completed questionnaires.

Among the 113 respondents, 79.6% are males, while 20.4% are females; 68.1% had or were pursuing college or university undergraduate course; 73.5% were aged between 26 to 35 years; 45.1% had a monthly income of over 20,000 naira (equivalent of 55 USD or £42).

Results and Data

The Impacts of the Internet in the IPOB Movement
Pertinent to research Q1, the survey included eight items asking the respondents to report, using a five-point scale (1=strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree) their level of agreement to identified impacts of the internet in the IPOB movement. First, we applied the principal component analysis to reduce the number of variables using SPSS version 24. As Table 1 shows, the analysis retained one component solution based on Eigenvalue < 1 rule. With the percentage of variance at 83.96, one component solution will provide the correlation with each individual item. As Table 2 shows, the factor loadings values of individual item suggest how strongly the relationship is between each of the individual items and the factor in isolation. Significantly, item Q13d, which hypotheses that *the internet makes*

it easier to source information that promotes Biafra loads or correlates the highest on the component at .930 than any other items. This is followed by item Q13e, which hypotheses that *the internet makes it easier to circulate military brutality, loading* at .926. Other interesting items are Q13c and Q13b, which points to the fact that the internet helps increase protests attendance, supports and funding; loading at 920 and 909 respectively. Although, all items loaded meaningfully with the component, item Q13f, which suggests *the internet makes it easier to verifying information or evidence against Nigerian government*, has the lowest loading or correlations with the component. However, since the factor loading is quite high it shows a strong relationship to the component. Overall, the result suggests a strong positive role of the internet in the IPOB movement.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.718	83.980	83.980	6.718	83.980	83.980
2	.378	4.727	88.707			
3	.343	4.290	92.997			
4	.201	2.518	95.515			
5	.115	1.432	96.947			
6	.108	1.356	98.303			
7	.073	.913	99.216			
8	.063	.784	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Principal component factor analysis (n = 113)

Table 1: Total variance explained

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.912	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square		1150.004
df		28
Sig.		**.000**
Component Matrix		
		Component 1
Q13d. The Internet makes it easier to source information that promotes Biafra		.930
Q13e. The Internet makes it easier to circulate military brutality		.926
Q13c. The Internet helps increase protest attendance		.920
Q13b. The Internet helps to increase support and funding for the IPOB Movement		.909
Q13a. The Internet helps to increase the number of registered IPOB members		.904
Q13g. The Internet makes it difficult for the Nigerian government to manipulate evidence against them		.899
Q13h. The Internet makes it easier for the main issues of the movement to circulate		.895
Q13f. The Internet makes it easier to verify information or evidence against the Nigerian government.		.879

Principal Component Analysis – Component matrix (n = 113). Sig level = .000. Measured scales for internet impact items were from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Participants' Engagements in Movement-Related Digital Activities

Pertinent to research question 2, which asked the extent participants engaged in a range of movement-related digital activities, the survey first included questions seeking to understand how often participants used the internet in their normal everyday activities. It is assumed that the extent to which participants engage in a range of digital media activities is relatively dependent on their overall frequency of internet use in their everyday activities. Considering the importance of sustained dissemination of pro-Biafran messages online in the visibility of Biafran independence cause, protesters' overall internet use will suggest the extent they play extra role in contributing to the communicative practices of the IPOB movement. As Table 3 also shows, 54% of respondents used the internet every day, 17% use the internet at least 1–2 times a week, while about 18% do not know. It is worthy of note here that although there is an increasing rate of internet penetration and usage in Nigeria, the cost and accessibility of internet services depends on location and mobile network provider. On a general note, mobile data subscription is expensive at around 1,000 naira ($3) per GB. While some network operators offer lower rates these are not available everywhere in Nigeria. On average, an individual will spend about 500 naira ($1.50) to 1000 naira ($3) per GB on data. According to the Nigerian Communication Commission, out of over 26 million Nigerians connected to Facebook in 2018, 25 million connect with mobile devices (Umeh, 2018), which attest to the level of data demands and consumptions amongst internet users. Significantly, this study suggests that 83.2% of the respondents have actually used the internet to promote Biafra independence (Figure 1), which demonstrates the extent participants sacrifice for Biafra independence causes. Protesters argue that they are able to gauge public opinion about the movement through social media, particularly Facebook. As such, using their social media every day allows them to reflect on their successes and weaknesses as well as direct their next actions, especially challenging, and/or contributing materials that correct misinformation. This article argues that frequencies of internet use for the movement-related activities suggest the level of individual involvement in the pro-Biafra independence struggle.
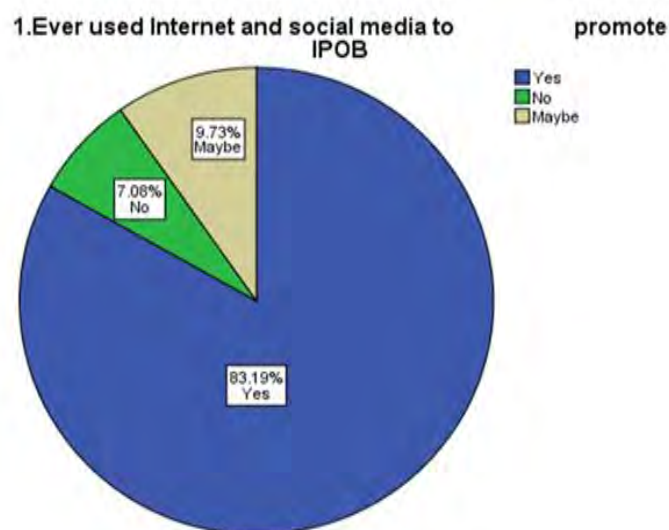

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who have ever used the internet or social media to promote Biafra independence.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Everyday	61	54.0	54.0	54.0
At least 1–2 times a week	19	16.8	16.8	70.8
At least 2–4 times a week	3	2.7	2.7	73.5
At least once a month	10	8.8	8.8	82.3
I don't know	20	17.7	17.7	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: The frequency of internet use

The survey also included nine items asking the respondents to report their engagement in a range of movement-related digital activities using a three-point scale (1 = No; 2 = Yes but not frequently; 3 = Yes but frequently). As Table 3 shows, 93% of the respondents had published an on-the-spot video of police and/or military brutality, and 61.1% had done so frequently.

Q7. Do you engage in the following movement-related digital activities? Frequency Analysis (n = 113)	No	% Yes, but not frequently	Yes, but frequently	N. Analysed
Publishing IPOB activist victims	10 (8.8)	38 (33.6)	65 (57.5)	113
Publishing on-the-spot videos of police/military brutality	8 (7.1)	36 (31.9)	69 (61.1)	113
Publishing pictures or video for/from protest or sit-in	6 (5.3)	35 (31.0)	72 (63.7)	113
Publishing materials that support the IPOB movement	7 (6.2)	40 (35.4)	66 (58.4)	113
Critiquing the current government in ways that offer support to IPOB movement	7 (6.2)	50 (44.2)	56 (49.6)	113
Responding to anti-Biafran views	13 (11.5)	53 (46.9)	47 (41.6)	113
Changing your profile to photos/ videos that publicize the movement	21 (18.6)	32 (28.3)	60 (53.1)	113
Refuting rumour or anti-Biafra propaganda	10 (8.8)	47 (41.6)	56 (49.6)	113
Debating or discussing social/political issues affecting Nigerian unity	6 (5.3)	47 (41.6)	60 (53.1)	113

Table 4: Frequency analysis of respondents' digital media activities in the service of the IPOB protest

Nearly 95% of the respondents had published pictures or videos arising from the protest ground, and 63.7% had done so frequently. Nearly 94% had contributed materials that supported the IPOB movement, and about 58% had done so frequently. This is consistent with the idea that "the internet gives social movements the possibility of spreading uncensored messages, and of attempting to influence the mass media" (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 166),

by enabling raw facts to get into the public sphere before they are filtered (Shirky, 2011). The result suggests an overwhelming culture of sharing protest manifestations including horrific pictures and videos of military brutality and/or protesters participation experience. In this way, in relation to the work of Penney and Dadas (2014), protesters' digital circulation of texts, photos and videos helped the IPOB movement to quickly build organically dispersed, networked counter publics that are able to critique power outside of the parameters of mainstream media.

The result shows that nearly 94% of the respondents had expressed personal criticism of the Nigerian government under President Buhari in ways that exposed the fundamental trigger of the protest. About the same per cent (94.7%) had debated with friends online on the social and political issues affecting Nigerian unity, and 53.1% had done so frequently. About 89% had responded to anti-Biafran views and nearly 42% had done so frequently. Moreover, nearly 82% of the respondents had changed their profile pictures with Biafra insignia to further publicize the IPOB movement, and 53.1% had done so frequently. Another important engagement of protestors was to refute anti-Biafran rumours and propaganda. Nearly 92% had refuted anti-Biafran rumours or propaganda, and almost 50% had done so frequently (see Table 4). This is consistent with Howard and Hussain (2011, 2013) who demonstrated that the activities of protestors on social media were the major means through which the global community came to understand what was going on during the Arab Spring. The authors suggested that protestors who were dissatisfied with the version of the event as told by the traditional media used social media to tell their own stories, proposing a new pattern of political communication. Although the act of "homophilous sorting," by which like-minded individuals mostly find and hear from each other in "filter bubbles," has been analysed as potentially weakening democratic participation, these mechanisms, as Tufekci (2013) contends, not only work to increase public attention to the cause but are also potentially positive in increasing participation (p.851).

Furthermore, we tested the extent to which participants' digital media practice helped them undertake extra leadership role of canvassing support for Biafra independence using a five-point scale (where 1 = Always and 5 = never). Table 5 shows that almost half of the respondents (49%) have *Always* canvassed support for Biafra independence on the internet; about 19% had done that *Very often*, while 23% had done that *Sometimes*. Only about 11.5% either did that *rarely* or never. The data also shows that about 82.3% of respondents were likely to maintain discussion about Biafran independence online (M =2.26, SD = 1.201), which suggest the overall confidence of protestors in promoting Biafran independence on the internet.

		N	Marginal Percentage
Q8. What is the extent to which you use the Internet to canvass support for Biafra independence	Always	55	48.7%
	Very Often	19	16.8%
	Sometimes	26	23.0%
	Rarely	8	7.1%
	Never	5	4.4%
Q9. How Likely are you to maintain discussion about Biafra independence online vs in person	Very Likely	42	37.2%
	Somewhat Likely	24	21.2%
	Likely	27	23.9%
	Unlikely	16	14.2%
	Very Unlikely	4	3.5%

Valid	113	100.0%
Missing	0	
Total	113	

Table 5: Case processing summary: Confidence using the internet to promote Biafra independence

While most respondents had no issue discussing Biafra on the internet (rating the attribute between 1 and 3), a smaller, but important segment of respondents, had little confidence in discussing Biafra online and rated the attribute between 4 and 5 (see Figure 2). This is contrary to Hampton et al. (2014) who found that social media did not provide alternative platforms for discussing controversial topics. In a Pew Research survey, which examined people's willingness to talk about the Edward Snowden leak in various in-person and online settings, the authors found that people were less willing to discuss the Snowden-NSA story in social media than they were in person. Indeed, mobile-based communication technology is promoting citizens' political discussion with others about government and politics in a developing country (Pang, 2018).
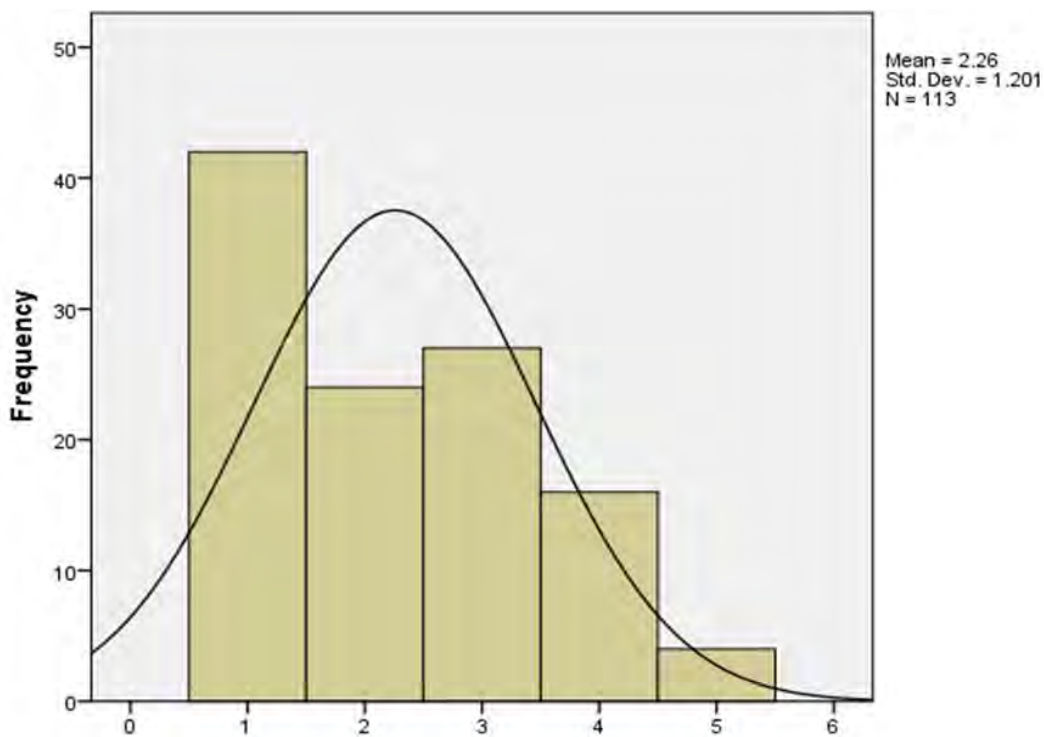

Figure 2: Likelihood of discussing Biafra online compared to face-to-face.
Source: author's field result.

Meanwhile, the survey included a question that asked respondents to select their main support provision.

		Responses		Per cent
		N	%	of Cases
Support role[a]	I have a personal blog dedicated to IPOB movement	18	9.3	15.9
	I have a news website dedicated to IPOB movement	15	7.7	13.3
	I play key roles in gathering information for IPOB media channels	61	31.4	54.0
	One of IPOB Directors	18	9.3	15.9
	No Specific Role for IPOB	25	12.9	22.1
	Produce or share issue-based information on the Internet in support of IPOB	53	27.3	46.9
	Other	4	2.1	3.5
Total		194	100.0	171.7

Descriptive statistics – multiple response analysis of support provision (n= 113). a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1; b. Note: The first percentage column represents the click on an individual item, while the percentage of cases represents people who have clicked on the items. It is more than 100% because people have selected more than one options.

Table 6: Main support provision selected by respondents

As Table 6 shows, more than half of the respondents (54%) had reported that they played key roles in gathering information for the IPOB media channels, and about 47% had produced or shared issue-based information on the internet, which support the ideology of the IPOB movement. About 30% had either a personal blog dedicated to the propagation of the Biafran independence cause or a website for the same purpose. This finding is consistent with the alternative media literature where scholars argue that social movement privilege amateur or native reporters in order to maintain the momentum of protests and dominate public space with information that the mainstream media would like to ignore (Atton, 2003, 2004). The success and visibility of collective actions have been attributed to people taking the role of a citizen journalist (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Al-Ghazzi, 2014), which centred on two related but not mutually exclusive modes of practice: witnessing (when ordinary people document and distribute reports and images of events they encounter) and activism (the strategic media output and contribution of political activists and dissidents whether videos, images, or social media participation) (Al-Ghazzi, 2014).

As the results shows, more than half of protesters play the role of a citizen journalist by spending several hours on the internet per day, and to effectively delivering on their support roles. About 62% claim to have spent several hours a day on frontline digital activism and support delivery; about 22% had done that between 2-4 hours a day, while about 13% had never spent time online for movement-related information (see Table 7). These figures suggest that a greater number of participants in the sample had a high level of involvement in terms of time spent on the internet for frontline delivery of information and support provision.

Q5. How much **time do you spend on internet per-day on frontline digital activism and support delivery**		N	%
Valid	Several hours a day	70	61.9
	2–4 hours a day	25	22.1
	4–6 hours a day	1	.9
	More than 6 hours	2	1.8
	None	15	13.3
	Total	113	100.0

Table 7: Time spent per day on frontline digital activism and support delivery.
Source: author's field result.

Motivating Factors and Source of Mobilising Information

Pertinent to research Q3, which asked participants their motivations and how they receive mobilising information, this study compared the internet and the alternative Radio Biafra broadcasts to understand the main source of movement's information, through which protesters received mobilising information. The survey included three items related to how they are mobilized to join the IPOB protests. First, respondents were asked to select two main channels through which they received information motivating them to join the IPOB protests. Second, respondents were asked to select one most important channel for getting movement-related information. Third, respondents were asked to select the most important social media platform on average for delivering pro-Biafran messages. Using descriptive statistics, as Table 8 shows, Radio Biafra broadcasts and social media received the highest click of about 43% and 33% respectively. The results suggest that nearly 80% of respondents had claimed that Radio Biafra was their main source of information. About 61% had selected social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp; 30.1% selected IPOB news websites and blogs, and 15% indicated interpersonal communication as their main source of information.

		Responses		Per cent
		N	%	of Cases
Main Source of Information[a]	Radio Biafra broadcast	90	42.9	79.6
	Internet platforms (IPOB News websites, blogs	34	16.2	30.1
	Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp)	69	32.9	61.1
	Interpersonal communication	17	8.1	15.0
Total		210	100.0	185.8

Descriptive Statistics – Multiple Response Analysis (n = 113). a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1; b. Note: The first percentage column represents the click on an individual item, while the percentage of cases represents people who have clicked on the items. It is more than 100% because people have selected more than one options

Table 8: Main source of protestors' information

The data also suggested that Radio Biafra is the most important channel through which more than half of the protesters received mobilising information. As Table 9 shows, 54% had answered Radio Biafra to the question of most important media channel; about 40% selected

social media, while about 5.3% selected the IPOB news websites. Meanwhile, only about .9% selected the Nigerian media.

Most important media channel	%
Radio Biafra	54.0
Nigerian Media (e.g. Vanguard, Channels TV, etc.)	.9
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp)	39.8
Internet (e.g. POB news websites)	5.3
Most important social media channel	
Facebook	58.4
Twitter	13.3
YouTube	5.3
WhatsApp	23.0

Table 9: The main channel for getting movement-related information (N= 113)

On the other hand, Facebook and WhatsApp emerged the most used social media platform by participants in the sample for communicating pro-Biafran issues. Table 9 also shows that about 58.4% of the respondents had indicated Facebook; 23% indicated WhatsApp, while Twitter and YouTube accounted for 13.3% and 5.3% respectively.

These results suggest that while many participants in the IPOB movement's protests were mobilized through Radio Biafra service, mobilising information also cut across the internet. On average, participants received movement-related information through both Radio Biafra and the internet. Given the dynamics of participants, especially in terms of their ideological sympathies, many of them would definitely rely on Radio Biafra programmes to get target information that motivates them to join the protest.

Meanwhile, on the motivating factor item, the results show that genuine feelings of marginalisation and exclusion of the Igbo, killing of pro-Biafran protesters and erosion of cohesive value system in Nigeria, which are basic topics of the Radio Biafra programmes, are strong motivating factors for participants in the sample. Although responses are polarized around different issues, as Table 10 shows, not only that, but about 71% of the respondents claimed to be motivated by that item, but the mean (M=.81) and standard deviation (SD= 1.088) also shows that *genuine feeling of marginalisation of the Igbo* had a wider representation of participant's motivating factor compared to other items in the question. Interestingly too, killing of the IPOB members by the Nigerian security, and lack of a cohesive value system in Nigeria was a better motivating factor for participants in the sample compared to the failure of leadership in Nigeria. However, there is little difference in their standard deviation. The results reveal that an average pro-Biafran protestor may be dissatisfied with the condition of the Igbo in Nigeria and the seemingly ethnic chicanery that characterize Nigerian bureaucratic politic. The discriminatory tendencies and the inequalities of political structures are a fact; which protesters have lived with.

		Responses		% of		
		N	%	Cases	Mean	St. D
Motivating Issues[a]	The killing of IPOB members by Nigerian security	73	23.9	64.6	.65	.480
	A genuine feeling of marginalisation and exclusion of the Igbo	80	26.2	70.8	.81	1.068
	Feelings of Islamic domination	26	8.5	23.0	.23	.423
	Lack of a cohesive value system in Nigeria	67	21.9	59.3	.59	.493
	Failure of leadership in Nigeria	59	19.3	52.2	.52	.502
Total		306	100.0	269.9	N 113	N113

Descriptive Statistics – Multiple Response Analysis (n = 113). a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1; b.Note: The first percentage column represents the click on an individual item, while the percentage of cases represents people who have clicked on the items. It is more than 100% because people have selected more than one options

Table 10: Issues motivating participants' decision to join IPOB protest.
Source: author's field
Result.

Constraints of Digital Media Activism in the Context of the IPOB Movement

Pertinent to research Q4, which sought to understand the constraints of digital media activism in the context of the IPOB movement, the survey included variables that asked respondents to select as many that have been a barrier to the use of digital media. Table 11 shows that about 67% of the respondents had identified affordability of the internet data as a major barrier to the use of the internet for movement-related activities. About 58% had worried about privacy and security, while about the same percentage were concerned about poor network qualities and coverage.

		Responses		% of
		N	%	Cases
The barrier to using the Internet[a]	Privacy and security (e.g. Misrepresentation and surveillance)	132	29.5	57.9
	Affordability of the Internet data	153	34.2	67.1
	Poor Network quality/coverage	131	29.3	57.5
	Electricity for charging the device	31	6.9	13.6
Total		447	100.0	196.1

Descriptive Statistics – Multiple Response Analysis (n = 113). a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 11. Barrier to participants' digital media activism

This result suggests that inasmuch as protesters engaged in different forms of digital activities, it was not without concern for affordability of data. This brings to question the economic implication of digital media in developing countries for social activism. Although the argument that resource mobilisation is a key component of social movement is seemingly becoming obsolete in the digital age, limited resources can cause a huge obstacle to digital activism. In the developing countries, the use of digital technologies for social activism may be constrained by the economic, social and political context in which they are utilized. This is true when the

cost of living is very high, making even the procurement of internet device such as smart mobile phones uncommon. As Table 12 shows, nearly 82% of the respondents had relied on sim data subscription to be able to access the internet and 82% had used smart mobile device. This suggests that the financial implications of subscribing for internet data and/or purchasing smart mobile device can limit some people from actively engaging in digital activities much more frequently. This factor may have accounted for about 35% of the respondents reporting to have used the internet *Sometimes, Rarely or Never* to canvass support for Biafra (Table 5) To have internet access that can allow for the kind of digital activities the IPOB activists engage in is to budget at least 5000 naira (eqv to 13.83USD) every month; this is very expensive for an average person in Nigeria.

	Frequency	%
Sim data subscription	92	81.4
Wi-Fi	17	15.0
Cyber café	4	3.5
Total	**113**	**100**
	Main Device	
Smart Phone	93	82.3
Laptop	18	15.9
Tablet	2	1.8
Total	113	100

Table 12. Frequency analysis of mode of Internet/Main Device

Effective and consistent internet data is the only means through which activists can post videos, audios and text on social media as well as access same in order to have full information to contribute to the IPOB movement's digital activism. It is somewhat difficult for activists in Nigeria to spend such money monthly for internet access without good income. What is clear is that IPOB protestors have internalized a radical view of freedom that even those who earn less strive to keep up with movement activities online and some with shops can lock them up on protest day to show solidarity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has revealed the extent of the IPOB movement participants' digital media activities. Some of the activities were primarily about showing support while some were an important part of the movement dynamics. One significant example is the documentation of protest activities that provide an on-the-spot assessment of human rights crimes. Protestors' digital media practices are therefore significant process of expanding the frontier of participation by linking physical spaces of protests with the cyberspace and in the process creating a space of autonomy (Castells, 2015). Since not all supporters of a social movement can participate in its collective protest actions at the same time due to "biographical availability" (Schussman & Soule, 2005) or other reasons, digital media activities allow supporters all over the world to follow the trend and participate without being physically present in the occupied areas.

The analysis of participants' digital practices focused on a number of dimensions that could be considered as significant indicators of level of involvement in the IPOB movement for Biafran independence in Nigeria. The results show that participants who used the internet more frequently were more confident in canvassing support for Biafra and were involved in the IPOB movement much more deeply. They were more likely to contribute mobilising information,

update government repressions and were more active in both frontline activism and support provision. This finding is consistent with the idea that digital media and connective actions have empowered protest movement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bennett et al., 2014), by diversifying activists' engagement repertoire (Theocharis, Lowe, Van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015). In the context of the IPOB movement, digital media and connective actions is not only understood in terms of effective mobilisation of Biafran identity but also maximising "the contagious power of enthusiastic online crowd "(Gerbaudo, 2016) where emotion-laden online posts diffuse in the community in ways that serve as a predictor of protest participation. Gerbaudo's analysis of the 2011 protests in Egypt and Spain affirms this position as he argues for the power of "emotional contagion" by which the emotions of web users can help "establish propitious psychological conditions" for protest participation (p.254). For the first time in the history of protests in Nigeria, protesters' recording of military brutalities provided human rights group such as the Amnesty International with the evidence to indict the Nigerian army on human rights charges. Protestors' engagements in newsgathering efforts were crucial in maintaining the movement's momentum, legitimacy and constituency support. This study shows that by deepening participants' involvement in pro-Biafran campaigns and communications, the empowering effects of the internet and Radio Biafra services can also be realized.

Significantly, the findings reported in this article provides new insights into the dynamics of activists' mobilisation process and contribute to better understanding of the synergy between the internet and activists' media, such as radio, in protest mobilisation. Current social movement literature tends to focus more on the empowering effects of the internet as alternative media for social activism without exploring the concomitant power of activists' media such as radio in contemporary social activism, much less Africa. The results suggest that a combination of the internet and special alternative Radio Biafra service in the context of the IPOB movement was an effective counter-public strategy for diffusing Biafra ideological messages that motivate adherents to collective action. This is true for a multi-ethnic Africa and Nigeria in particular. The results suggest that more than half of participants received mobilising information from Radio Biafra service, which is believed to take their situation seriously. The relevance of radio in social mobilisation has been argued in terms of its ability to knit people together socially, politically and emotionally, making identity negotiation a collective and individual process, strengthened by shared feelings and experiences (Mann, 2019). The results show that Radio Biafra served as a vehicle for diffusing Biafran ideology into the hearts and minds of its listeners and motivated participants to the protests. However, a considerable number of the participants received mobilising information from the internet, which suggest a complementary role between the internet and Radio Biafra in diffusing movement related information that mobilized participants to IPOB protests. Essentially, both the internet and Radio Biafra service played a complementary role; thus served as alternative media channels for communicating pro-Biafran issues.

Beyond digital media practices, one of the key motivating factors for participants in the IPOB protest was genuine feelings of marginalisation of the Igbo ethnic group which seems to characterize the topics being analysed on the Radio Biafra programmes. Meanwhile, the killing of IPOB members and the perception of a lack of cohesive value system motivated participants more than the variable that indicated leadership failure in Nigeria. This result is consistent with Johnson and Olaniyan (2017) who found that the Igbo ethnic group (the majority of the ethnic group seeking Biafra independence) are virtually an isolated group subtly denied access to important political positions. This study shows that the IPOB movement participants have a feeling of collective victimisation and see participation as an opportunity for articulating their

sense of marginalisation and exclusion from Nigerian bureaucratic politics. The results also suggest that participants are convinced there is no cohesion in the entity called Nigeria and by engaging in protest-related digital practices, they can make their feelings known. This is consistent with Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2007) who argued that

> "societal groups that are represented one-sidedly, disadvantaged, stigmatized, or even repressed can especially benefit from using the channels of communication opened by alternative media to strengthen their internal identity, manifest this identity to the outside world, and thus enable social change and/ or development" (pp. 14–15).

Most participants engaged effectively with digital media and canvassed support for pro-Biafran independence cause. However, there is strongly concerns regarding affordability of internet data. While the internet may appear to offer low-cost participation in protests movement, as studies have suggested, this current result suggests that economic and political resources may affect the extent to which people engage in digital media activities, at least among protest participants in Africa. As most respondents indicated they used smart mobile phones and Sim-data subscriptions to access the internet, the affordances of monthly internet data can pose a barrier to full digital media activism.

What these results mean for Africa and Nigeria in particular is that using only the internet in defining alternative media and communication in Africa in terms of social activism could be limiting, as it "carries the danger of overlooking other small-scale oriented communication" (Mano, 2016) and media used by the marginalized subalterns in the hostile cultural environment of Africa. The IPOB movement is related to Catalonian movement in Spain because of its bottom-up character – what Della Porta and O'Connor (2017) called "referendums from below" – in opposition to the "top-down" equivalent seen, for example, in Scotland (Crameri, 2015). In Catalonia, social movement actors launched a campaign on self-determination and independence. As it infolded, it brought institutional actors and political elites together with other civil society actors. Thus, all participants broadened the repertoires of action of the campaign and introduced innovative forms of organisation (Della Porta and O'Connor 2017, p. 2). However, unlike the Catalonian movement, the bourgeois within the Biafran constituency, who are benefiting from the corrupt bureaucratic character of Nigeria, make frantic efforts to demobilize the idea of Biafra. Thus radio became an effective tool for keeping the right message in the minds of ordinary Biafrans who feel the reality of exclusion in Nigerian bureaucratic politics. Through effective use of Radio Biafra and the internet, the IPOB actors were able promote the gains of a Biafran Republic, while highlighting fears of those in opposition to it. This strategy helps fill the gap created by various forms of digital divides associated with the use of digital media alone in social mobilisation.

By highlighting various forms of appropriations of digital media, the article contributes to expanding the literature on the social embeddedness of the internet in the struggle for social change in the Nigerian public sphere. Importantly too, it provided deeper insights into the supplementary role of radio (hereafter called activists' media) in deepening participation and involvements for African social movements.

This study is only an exploratory step towards systematically analysing the implications of digital media activism for pro-Biafran protestors in Nigeria. Both the method and the topology of digital media activities can be further refined and/or developed. For instance, further study can investigate the manifest content of the IPOB social media pages to further highlights

activist communication character and the type of message communicated. Second, a review of Radio Biafra programmes in relation to how they are received within the constituency of Biafra can further reveal the impacts it has had on the movement for Biafra independence.

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Falling for the Amphibian Man: Fantasy, Otherness, and Auteurism in del Toro's *The Shape of Water*

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Abstract

Guillermo del Toro's reputation as one of the world's most esteemed filmmakers builds on fairy tale and horror-inspired films featuring monsters, such as *Hellboy* (2004) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). Not only is del Toro's obsession with the fantasy genre often emphasized, it also incorporates the theme of embracing otherness, which is demonstrated through the allegory of monstrous entities in most of his works. As a Mexican director, del Toro strives to insert his status as "the other" in his movies. This article addresses Guillermo del Toro's 2017 Oscar-winning film, *The Shape of Water*, through auteur theory with references to fantasy film principles. In a range of aspects, from visual style to its rooted themes, del Toro's films make use of a distinctive set of features with dark green colour, special effects makeup, as well as the theme of resistance against oppression and marginalisation. Using *The Shape of Water* as a case study, the argument is that the film serves as a critique as well as a defiance against the widespread issues of rising bigoted slurs, immigration bans and racial resentment in the United States, which have occurred ever since the victory of President Donald Trump in early 2017. Indeed, del Toro's triumphs at the 90th Academy Awards have solidified the importance of fantasy films as counter-narratives.

Keywords: Guillermo del Toro, *The Shape of Water*, fantasy, otherness, auteurism

Introduction

The years 2017 and 2018 were crowded with protest hashtags: #MeToo, #TimesUp, #WomensMarch, #TakeAKnee, #BlackLivesMatter, #MuslimBan, #DACA, and #NoBanNoWall. From sexual abuse scandals surrounding former film producer Harvey Weinstein to President Donald Trump's controversial policies, social movements were on the rise in the United States and other countries all over the world. As a result, many artists, writers, and filmmakers have tried to commemorate these occasions through creating works which embody some of these issues. Among them, one of the most notable is Mexican director Guillermo del Toro's latest fantasy romance film, *The Shape of Water* (2017), which garnered numerous international awards, positive critical responses and high ratings from film critics. The movie received praise for its unique love story, and its implied messages of acceptance, regardless of skin colour, sexual orientation, and way of life (David, 2018; Scott, 2017).

Like many of del Toro's movies, *The Shape of Water* revolves around a monstrous figure, an Amazonian amphibious humanoid (similar to Abe Sapien, the amphibian field agent who possesses psychic powers in *Hellboy* and *Hellboy II*) known as "the asset", who acts as the catalyst for the movie's main plot. The protagonist is a mute woman named Elisa Esposito who works as a janitor in a secret government lab and later falls in love with and rescues the amphibian man from being vivisected. Other supporting characters are Colonel Richard Strickland, a controlling military soldier who leads the research team on the amphibious creature, Zelda Fuller, a Black woman who befriends and works with Elisa as a janitor, Robert Hoffstetler, a Soviet spy working as a scientist at the lab, and Giles, Elisa's neighbour and a struggling illustrator who helps rescue the creature. As well as accentuating monsters as personification, del Toro also portrays his characters to have disabilities and other 'imperfections' (concerning race, gender and sexual orientation). These characters are portrayed to be using their abilities, intuition, and intelligence in determining their fate and the fate of others.

In one of his interviews, del Toro claims to have been inspired by *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, Jack Arnold's 1954 film, in which the amphibian creature falls for the female protagonist, but they end up separated (Gray, 2018). *The Shape of Water* grossed $63.9 million domestically and $195.2 million internationally (Mojo, 2018). It received numerous prestigious awards such as Best Picture, Best Director, Best Production Design, and Best Original Score at the 90th Academy Awards; Best Director and Best Original Score at the 75th Golden Globe Awards, and a Golden Lion for Best Film in 2017. This achievement solidified del Toro's status as one of the 'Three Amigos of Cinema' along with his two compatriots, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Alfonso Cuarón. Internationally, del Toro is famous for producing Academy Award-winning fantasy film *El laberinto del fauno*/*Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and directing mainstream American sci-fi-action films namely *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004), *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008), and *Pacific Rim* (2013).

Indeed, Guillermo del Toro is a visionary filmmaker with many interests: fairy tales, ghosts, gothic horror, historical fantasy, giant monsters, vampires, classic literature, and comics. In the United States, del Toro is regarded for his works of horror and dark fantasy, which are heavily ingrained with malformed and monstrous beauty. He is an eccentric who is obsessed with demonic characters, insectile and religious imagery, elements of Catholicism, labyrinths, underworld and clockwork patterns, and other things that do not fully conform to the standards of Mexican, Spanish or American films in general. As an accomplished novelist and screenwriter, del Toro writes most of his own scripts and is known to be a detail-oriented and

hands-on director. He makes intricate notes for storyboarding, and designs each of his characters in sketchbooks – some of which he has published in a compilation entitled *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections, and Other Obsessions* (2013).

In addition to all of these, del Toro is also famous for using special-effects make-up in his films for aesthetic purposes, going as far as hiring practical effects crew to build, sculpt, and paint prosthetic bodysuits for his non-human characters. He also hires digital visual effects teams to give more effects to the practical make-up while filming. As a filmmaker, the nature of del Toro's works also lies in the characterized tradition of his collaboration with a band of transnational actors in numerous projects, namely Argentinian Federico Luppi (*Cronos, El espinazo, El laberinto*), and Americans Ron Perlman (*Cronos, Blade II, Hellboy, Hellboy II, Pacific Rim*) and Doug Jones (*Hellboy, Hellboy II, El laberinto, The Shape of Water*), as well as cinematographer Guillermo Navarro (*Cronos, The Devil's Backbone, Hellboy, El laberinto, Hellboy II, Pacific Rim*) (Tierney, 2014, p. 2). His consistency in using "paranormal chaos" which challenges human corruptness as a background also serves as another signifying point to his filmmaking trademark (Atkinson, 2007, p. 52).

Some of del Toro's films are also centred on children and ingrained with cult film and comic book styles (*Blade II, Hellboy, Hellboy II*). He has also blended some crucial but still-coherent genres: fantasy (all of his movies), horror (*Cronos, Mimic, El espinazo,* The Strain Trilogy Novel, and to some degree, *El laberinto*), and action-adventure (*Blade II, Hellboy, Hellboy II, Pacific Rim*) (Tierney, 2014, p. 2). As a world-renowned filmmaker, del Toro also challenges the 'general' norms of directorial work since the line which separates his English-language and Spanish-language films is not steadily established (Davies, 2007, p. 135; Guillermo Del Toro, 2008, p. 38). In support of his distinguished status, del Toro's films are rich in disturbing historical elements, as seen in *El espinazo del diablo* and *El laberinto del fauno*, which use the backdrop of fascism during the Mexican revolution and the Spanish Civil War (Lazaro-Reboll, 2013, p. 44). In *The Shape of Water*, del Toro adjusts the movie to the American socio-cultural background by using the Cold War era, (approximately 1945–1989), with ruthless authoritarian military figures who become villains.

I argue that *The Shape of Water*, which celebrates the presence of misfits with its genre, together with the auteur theory, visual style and themes, can be framed as del Toro's signature approach that challenges traditional conventions in genre and narrative. I build my argument on directorial interviews and review excerpts as comprehensive material for framing my analysis. In the following section, I will explain how del Toro's signature approach gives significant influence and contribution to his latest film, *The Shape of Water*.

Framing del Toro's Signature Approach

Auteur Theory

Pinpointed as a film history theory, American film critic Andrew Sarris states that auteur criticism focuses on the long-built reputation of senior directors whose films have shown a certain thematic blueprint and visual signature marker (1968, pp. 26–27). First and foremost, the word "auteur" literally means "author" and is understood as having affiliations with literary personalities (Sarris, 1968, p. 27). Initially formulated as a way to establish rankings, categories, and lists of film history, the term "auteur" was triggered by the remark of Paul Valéry in the initial publication of the French cinema magazine, *Cahiers du Cinema*, in 1954, who states that, "Taste is made of a thousand distastes", thus using it to identify the rapidly-verifiable works of

European filmmakers (Sarris, 1968, p. 27). Subsequently, the theory is utilized to critique and analyse the works of Hollywood directors.

Auteur theory is used to examine directors who have already directed numerous films and established certain styles of cinematography. Hence, the works of "new" directors are rarely analysed using this theory, making the theory known for focusing on "senior" directors who possess distinctive visions and established trademarks. The "*la politique des auteurs*", the authorship policy coined by Francois Truffaut in *Cahiers*, is later utilized by Sarris to categorize the status of his "pantheon", a nine-part hierarchical system of film ranking based on his standards (Corrigan, 2012, p. 411; Watson, 2003, p. 137). Yet, this categorisation is later seen as inaccurate since "it is less a fully worked-out theory than a critical method", with the theory diminishing the fact that films are made of crucial contributing aspects such as collaboration, commerciality, and the use of advanced special effects (Corrigan, 2012, p. 411). Thus, films are barely the products of a single authorial vision of directors.

The "essential" auteur in a movie, is, in fact, the one with the most intense personality and creative intentions – it might be the scriptwriter, the director or the dialogue writer (Mitry, 2000, p. 6). It is often the director who is worthy of the title, since he has the principal authority to reassess, rearrange, and connect his personal concept to those of his colleagues, regardless of their position (Mitry, 2000, p. 6). However, if the director only focuses on the technical execution of an already-planned project presented to him, then the main auteur is the scriptwriter.

Meanwhile, auteur critics are prone to be labelled as figures who choose to perceive films for commerciality rather than quality purposes. Francois Truffaut makes use of American films as a tool to counter the snobbish tendencies of French films, hence granting the auteur theory a reputation of siding with "uncultured" filmmakers and alleviating their status in the cinema world. Auteur theory's most challenging notion is its tendency to glorify certain directors, not as an acknowledgement of individual creative aptitude, but for the sake of aggressive commerciality (Watson, 2003, p. 136). This concept is a critical strategy for classifying "high-art" movies to "low-art" ones, categorising directors to be "metteurs-en-scène" – directors with technical competence but do not infuse personal signature style – and auteurs – directors with genuine and recognisable styles in most of their films (Watson, 2003, p. 136). Therefore, auteur criticism is more of an attitude than a theory, which is aimed more at directorial autobiography than film history (Sarris, 1968, p. 30).

Nevertheless, auteur theory continues to be a significant means in film studies. Film scholars James Naremore and Graeme Turner suggest that the authorship framework facilitates people to discern films accurately; it can perform as an offence and a mode of defiance towards conventions, particularly if mingled with cultural studies as well as methods of contemporary film analysis (Naremore, 1999, pp. 22–23; Turner, 2006, p. 55). Evaluating his own claims, Andrew Sarris states how both "strong" and "weak" directors have to be taken into account since they sustain one another's existence (1968, p. 31).

Indeed, auteur theory serves as the tool to examine the influence of directors in terms of their filmic characteristic styles that make their works stand out among those of others. Here, Sarris also highlights how critics who want to utilize auteur theory should place the director and his films in terms of historical positioning. He claims that, "auteur critics should avoid judging the present in terms of the past, and should opt to relate the past to the present in the most meaningful way possible" (1968, p. 33). It implies that relating the director's latest work with

his preceding movies is only valid when we try to interpret or highlight specific political and socio-cultural viewpoints implied in his films in order to support our arguments. Peter Wollen asserts that the true challenge of applying auteur criticism is not necessarily found in the canonical nature of a filmmaker's work, but in movies which initially give an impression to be unconventional (2000, p. 74). Debates regarding film authorship have discussed various filmic features that are fundamental in emphasising the authorial existence, such as visual style and techniques, elements of narrative, and themes. In this vein, I will explore *The Shape of Water* using the *auteurist* approach, aiming to perceive it as a social critique, with del Toro as a filmmaker who mixes genres and breaks conventions.

del Toro's Approach to Filmmaking
Since narrative, theme, and visual style are the most explored features of del Toro's filmmaking among critics and commentators, I will elucidate several reflective points here. First, the use of repressed but secretly rebellious female characters with dark pasts, supernatural powers, and disabilities who are often in their early teens or mid-twenties is a regular feature in del Toro's narratives, causing his work to be intriguing from a feminist perspective. Ana Vivancos remarks that by making those characters "silenced", "denied the power of action", and "reduced", del Toro shows how his female characters determine their fate by choosing complete submission or exercising autonomy (2012, pp. 883–884). In *The Shape of Water*, the female protagonist and the female supporting character, Elisa Esposito and Zelda Fuller, are constantly marginalized. Since Elisa is mute and Zelda is Black, these women secretly collaborate and support one another, taking charge of their lives amid adversity and tyranny from Strickland, and finally obtaining their freedom. Elisa is particularly significant to the story in rescuing the amphibian asset, as she creates an escape plan for the creature with Giles and later receives help from Zelda and Hoffstetler. In doing so, the five characters – portrayed as the abused and the marginalized – manage to confront Strickland's dictatorship, who is an epitome of white supremacy and domination.

Secondly, monsters have been a lifelong obsession for del Toro (he built a house called Bleak House, which was full of a collection of books, framed art, and sculptures which depict monstrous figures). Many of his films consist of grotesque inhuman entities as central characters to the plot and a central narrative element: sarcastic red demon Anung Un Rama and sceptical amphibious humanoid Abraham "Abe" Sapien in *Hellboy I* and *Hellboy II*, the eccentric Faun and horrifying Pale Man in *El laberinto*, the half-man, half-lizard amphibian in *The Shape of Water*. Strikingly, the two aquatic humanoid characters (Abe Sapien in both Hellboy films and the amphibian creature in *The Shape of Water*), the Faun and the Pale Man (in *Pan's Labyrinth*) – all played by contortionist and mime Doug Jones – also emerge frequently as an explicit narrative pattern in del Toro's movies that frequently embody an inverted form of humanity or society.

As an illustration, the theme of *The Shape of Water* focuses on representing the mistreatment and marginalization of "the other". This manifests in the brutal torture and exploitation of the amphibian asset to serve the space race and Cold War. It is also seen in the marginalized of lower-class characters like Elisa and Zelda for being mute and Black respectively, and Hoffstetler for being an "enemy" as a Russian and a traitor for helping rescue the creature. The asset receives constant torture due to its status as an inhuman being with unique supernatural powers that are hard for humans to understand. The theme may be related to del Toro's exposure to race-based marginalization while living in the United States. Being Mexican, del Toro is acutely aware that his presence has often been perceived as "the other" – foreign, alienated, and ostracized – which corresponds to the characteristics of monsters. Our

subconscious interest in monsters stems from the fact that first, they more or less resemble us, and secondly, their existence poses a challenge toward the cultured way of thinking, representing aspects of impurity that the society wishes to get rid of – hence, monsters are perceived as scapegoats who are held responsible for all the troubles in the society and have to be sacrificed (Davies, 2014, pp. 29–30). Knowing these facts makes del Toro subsequently set up this overarching pattern in his films.

Third, for the visual approach, del Toro uses a set of specific choices of colour as a strategy. In *The Shape of Water*, del Toro has mostly used teal, the medium blue-green colour, for the amphibian humanoid and the water, red, and dark green for the human characters' clothes. These two colours are significant in accentuating the melancholic and solemn atmosphere of Elisa's muted world and later relationship with the amphibian creature, as well as the strict, perfectionist, authoritarian world of the military figures. In an interview, *The Shape*'s cinematographer Dan Laustsen mentions how del Toro wanted him to use particular colours for the award-winning movie: "Greens and blues were chosen to represent water, and red was brought in for life, love and death. And then we focused on shadows and contrast" (Pritchard, 2018). Laustsen also mentions that while the costume of the creature was already well-crafted, the cinematography crew did not need to do much about the light for the amphibian creature, and later opted for CGI. Del Toro's long-time fascination and preference for special-effects make-up also influences the style of his movies, manifesting in his collaboration with highly experienced makeup artist crews to build his monstrous figures. For *The Shape of Water*, del Toro requested the special-effects crew make a small-sized sculpture from his hand-drawing design, and then build the prosthetic costume in meticulous-detail before applying it to actor Doug Jones. The crew also used VFX to add the floating and underwater effect to particular scenes where Elisa and the creature interact (Pritchard, 2018).

Fourth, the strongest traits of del Toro's themes in *The Shape of Water* is the profound existence of water, the gloomy colours of green, teal, and red, and the liquidity of transition and transformation. I argue that the images of translucent underwater space in which Elisa dreams in her sleep, the flowing water in her bathtub, and the creature's underwater tank contribute to the critical aesthetics and thematic shifts of the film. It could be said that the metaphorical sensations we generally correspond to water and deep ocean diving, into the representational zone of bleak corridors of the lab and dimly lit bathroom – where many of the activities in *The Shape of Water* take place – are crucial in representing the "unknown" and "unclear" future of the Cold War era.

Fifth, the compassionate visual and sensual sensations of the film are composed of surreal contradictions: the passionate love-makings of two different-species lovers, the brash and violent acts of hitting, hurting and electrocuting, the gentle and forlorn actions of silent communicating and dancing. As we correlate the element of water with these motions, they actually fall into place. These aspects signify how del Toro induces hatred, anger, love, empathy – universal emotions that exist within the everyday lives of people – as his theme to represent real life in his movies.

This cinematographic effect characterizes a consistent feature of del Toro's works, which emphasizes how the unimaginable or disconcerting supernatural phenomena can be adjusted or negotiated within the borders of logic. Del Toro's visual style represents an infiltration of the fantastical realm into reality. Indeed, it is explicit in *The Shape of Water*, with the problematic and challenging presence of the captured amphibian man who constantly rebels against his torturers. In this sense, del Toro wishes to introduce something irrational and

"unpredictable" that defies the "well-adjusted" world. This reflexivity does emerge and dictate the flow of del Toro's films, for he has always been principled in presenting the issues of otherness in his works.

Moreover, since *The Shape of Water*'s is set in an actual historical time and place, this mode of expression is a much-explored portion of the film. In one scene, Zelda and Elisa are seen cleaning the inside area of a rocket lab where there is a space capsule heat shield hanging from the ceiling. Many scenes display people driving teal-coloured Cadillacs on the streets, which highlights the 1950s period in Baltimore, United States. In these scenes, del Toro exhibits reflexivity regarding the form of fantasy, as well as its implied messages and potentials, which somehow are typical in his films. Therefore, through contemplating all of these aspects, del Toro is not merely producing films with monsters; he is purposefully establishing his cinematographic trademark and criticising the social and political implications surrounding them.

Furthermore, we can take a look at how del Toro creates his films by deriving from fable and fairy tale, as well as myths from different cultures, allegory, historical fiction, horror fiction, comic-based supernatural superhero materials, and sometimes science fiction. For instance, in *The Shape of Water* (2017), the characters come from different race, gender and cultural backgrounds. The background is also a vital historical moment during which geopolitical tensions persist between the Soviet Union and the United States. The world of *The Shape of Water* is a narrative which combines a world of black-and-white movies, teal Cadillac cars and green jellies (which characteristically portrays the romanticized futuristic era led by President Kennedy), and a fantasy realm where humanoid creatures exist. All of these aspects are tell-tale signs of the classical Hollywood cinema.

Thus, I argue that del Toro has benefitted from the way classical Hollywood facilitates the invention of myths just as much as archaic fairy tales do. The specific framework of *The Shape of Water* integrates the principles of Hollywood's Golden Age – since the principal storyline shares definite echoes with *Creature from the Black Lagoon* – with a narrative constructed to appear universal to differing cultures in the world, thus resulting in a fantastical allegory about the relationship between an individual and the "other". Another strategy used in *The Shape of Water* is del Toro's drawn influence from films by Terry Gilliam and classical Hollywood actors and actresses such as Charlie Chaplin and Audrey Hepburn for creating the character of Elisa, thus reinforcing his tenet of drawing inspiration and knowledge from Hollywood's Golden Age. In this way, we may recognize del Toro as an imaginative traditionalist who grounds his work on traditional (even archetypal) configurations across cultures and filmic modes, at the same time providing them with personalized traits that defy some of their indispensable cores.

Still, del Toro's work is unique in terms of the genre and narrative means from which he derives. Kristian Moen notes that transformation and metamorphosis are two primary aspects which exist in cinema's fairy tales, that may occur in various forms (2013, p. xiv). One of the crucial purposes of fantasy and fairy tale cinema is that they help "articulate the ways in which we might see, understand and feel the effects of a changing modern world" (Moen, 2013, p. xvi). In many ways, del Toro's films would suit best under the "paradigmatic" classification as they tend to operate within the boundaries and conventions of classic Hollywood cinema that generally have fundamental literary or pictorial narrative associations, such as folk or fairy tales. However, a twist always exists in del Toro's movies, thanks to his cultural background and personalized creative input.

The Shape of Water as Epitome of Social Movement

In his book, *Cabinet of Curiosities* (2013), del Toro states that "It's only through art that you're able to glimpse otherness" (p. 477), referring to his frequent creations of monstrous entities to help the audience perceive foreigners as something that is intimate, common, and invaluable. Indeed, the theme of embracing otherness has often been in del Toro's agenda for decades as he plays with representations and symbols. Film theorist Bill Nichols explains how ideology, image, and representation can mutually support one another. Nichols states that symbols serve as "delegates" which exemplify what we ascribe to, and that they act as our "representatives", thus making them representations (1981, p. 1). Meanwhile, an ideology uses a set of arranged images and levels of representation to convey certain aspects to the audience, showing them "this is how it should be" (p. 1). By carefully taking all of these concepts into account, del Toro chose to give his film the Cold War politic climate with villainous bureaucrat figures, socially-misfit characters, and a fish god through which to deliver his political and social-conscious message.

In an interview about the film, del Toro emphasizes that setting *The Shape of Water* during the height of the Cold War hysteria in 1962, is representative of the situation of being a minority living in America during the divisive Trump government in 2017:

> They're actually talking about an America which never existed," he says. "In 1962, everything was idealised about the future, but it was a future that never really came to be. The cars had jet fins, the kitchens are beautiful, everything is automatic, everything is modern, but in '63 Kennedy is shot and that Camelot collapses. It never really happens. So it's not a movie about '62. It's a movie that tells you that the racism, classism, sexual mores, everything that was alive in '62, is all alive now. It never went away (Applebaum, 2018).

During the Cold War era, the United States was engaged in an ideological battle against the Soviet Union, and the segregations in the society along racial, class, and gender boundaries threatened to tear the "internal" society apart and tarnish America's reputation abroad (May, 2008, p. 8). In their propaganda messages, American rulers promoted an "the American way of life" closely aligned with the glorification of capitalism. Images of a stable domestic ideal were promoted in which wealth, life in the suburbs, and white bourgeois nuclear family were presented as aspirational goals (May, 2008, p. 8). However, poverty and racism prevailed, leading to discrimination, segregation, and brutality, in which people of colour could not have the privileges of American affluence (May, 2008, p. 9). Therefore, I argue that del Toro's representation of the "perfect", "well-ordered", and "futuristic" world of Richard Strickland, the most influential antagonist in the movie who embodies all of these Cold War "qualities", is actually intended to highlight the flaws in an exaggerated ideal American image. The representation of Richard Strickland is a direct criticism against white supremacy, which has caused more damage than benefit to marginalized people for decades. What is more, this culture-sanctioned superiority and racism only serve as blinders for Strickland – a representation of white and male supremacists – which prevent him from examining his flaws and dealing with his insecurities (Adji, 2018, p. 176).

Film critic Renuka Vyavahare (2018) comments on how del Toro manages to create a combined world of fairy tale and reality:

> Reading from the word go; the visionary filmmaker paints a visual and emotional masterpiece that strikes an incredible balance between reality and fantasy … More than its visual brilliance, what captivates you the most is del Toro's ability to capture the minutiae of his ordinary characters' everyday life. An unlikely amalgamation of supernatural, spiritual and sci-fi elements, *The Shape of Water* at heart, is a simple tale of hope and empathy. It rebuilds your faith in love, which isn't and shouldn't be defined by a certain shape or form.

This comment supports my argument that del Toro's realistic narrative tries to portray how these "different" figures live their lives, support and interact with one another – which turns out to be not that much different from the so-called "majority". Another critic, Mihir Fadnavis (2018), confirms this idea by stating that:

> But even in the familiar moments there is much to love and adore about this fairy tale for adults. Nowadays we seldom see films that are crafted with so much love and care, where even the violence becomes a work of art. Del Toro's philosophy is prescient, in that we've become so disillusioned with this world we tend to turn towards monsters to take us to a different world, and without a proper voice we wish every night to find someone who can give us one.

Thus, I argue that "embracing otherness" conveyed in *The Shape of Water* is not only about America. "Embracing otherness" in a global era has developed into a more complicated, multi-faceted, and integrated process of arbitration, negotiation, and allotment. All of these aspects occur in the web of the film's political and emotional backdrop. They signify specific signs that concern the narrative, its ideology and influential elements, as well as the new approach of encrypting them. Del Toro has, I believe, lifted the "textually coherent fantastical allegory" of myth archetypal Hollywood to another level, which is the level of "discernible disruption", leading towards that of visionary "sensibility".

To induce the theme of "otherness", filmmakers generally create allegories by combining narrative materials with folkloric roots and origin, ending up with crossbreed films. Patterns from fables and mythological archetypes as well as fairy tales and war-violence stories are commonly intertwined and crafted together. Moreover, post-classical Hollywood is notable for producing hybrids of perpetual classics (Elsaesser, 2011, p. 252). Critic David Edelstein identifies the cinematic ancestry of *The Shape of Water* thus:

> I can guess what's in it after seeing his Venice Film Festival-prize-winning *The Shape of Water*, which screened in Toronto and opens commercially in December. *The Creature of the Black Lagoon*, with *Beauty and the Beast* and *E.T.* (and *Splash*?). *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The excellent British monster film *Death Train* (a.k.a. *Raw Meat*), which del Toro talked to me about 13 years ago before a Lincoln Center screening, citing subterranean tunnels of objects of fascination when he was growing up in Mexico City.

Another critic, Peter Travers, being simplistic, summarizes the story like this:

> His latest is a Cold War romance about a mute cleaning lady (Sally Hawkins) who falls hard for an amphibious creature (Doug Jones) being used for secret scientific experiments. The film doesn't fit in any of the usual Hollywood boxes; it's a thing of beauty and terror that can't be defined and dismissed as "lonely

girl finds love with the Creature from the Black Lagoon," either… through there
is a little of that in it, too (Travers, 2017).

Without casting aside its capability to serve as a narrative, the hybridity grants more space for "contents", "aspects", and "signs" to attribute themselves to the film. *The Shape of Water* is similar to its much-mentioned all-time classic muse, Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), which received high praise but at the same time stereotyped in its time for having the modus operandi of using terrifying "cross-species eroticism" (Bergstrom, 2015) with a half-man and half-fish creature, a scream-horror queen, and male dominant figures. *Creature* succeeded in outlasting the critics and became a permanent classic. The half-man and half-fish creature even became one of Hollywood's most iconic beasts, joining the Frankenstein monster, Wolf-man, Mummy, and Dracula.

The ideological message of the movie appears to suit del Toro's critique of contemporary US immigration and international policies that were (around 2017 and 2018) increasingly nationalistic. This manner focuses on how racial exclusion and social inequality patterns are explored and applied to capture the ways of life of the "others" – each within their distinct elements. Del Toro (aside from his political views) was well aware of America's intensely disputable international role, and its situation of being caught in a geopolitical tension between two competing superpower countries. Connected to the years of 2017 and 2018, del Toro was of course very much aware of the victory of a white, Republican business-mogul-turned president whose campaign focus was to change the immigration policy by building barriers along the Mexico-United States border and thus affecting the fate of younger immigrants vernacularly called "Dreamers" (Parker, 2019). This strongly resonates with del Toro' s status as a Mexican immigrant himself; a point he has highlighted in accounts of experiencing marginalisation in the United States:

> I may have light skin and sort of lighter hair, but the moment I open my mouth
> in immigration, all that goes away. When I'm stopped many times by a cop on a
> traffic violation and I speak, I am immediately a Mexican. So these are things I
> am trying to say [in the film] (Applebaum, 2018).

It is significant to remember that "embracing otherness" is a key strategy for the director. As an auteur, a director holds the power of controlling the flow of the narrative and providing his self-representation in his movies. The core of del Toro's narrative is that of the wonder-struck child who, from such a young age, was so drawn to mythologies, fairy tales, monstrous entities, dark and horror fantasies, fairy tales, and religious relics and artefacts that he spent hours drawing fictitious beasts, designing clockwork motifs, reading comics, writing stories and collecting monstrous toy figures and trinkets. Del Toro establishes juxtaposing links among these genres, being both a storyteller and a horror-and-fantasy maestro with a vivacious imagination, who is always fascinated by "the horror of biology" (which motivated him to study special-effects make-up professionally), "very gory religious imagery" (Wood, 2006, p. 30), red colour, and traditions from old folklores. Much of this personal narrative serves as an excellent catalyst for *The Shape of Water* as del Toro draws on fantastical influences for his preferences for misfits in the film. His interest in mythology, fairy tales, monsters, as well as his passion for special-effects make-up indicates a pro-otherness message of someone whose undertakings and hobbies hold such high regard and respect for ancient beings, traditions, beliefs, and their mysteries. It expresses the strong enthusiasm and curiosity of a fantasy director, which makes the contemporary dark mystical realm of the humanoid amphibian and the misfit characters less threatening and more humanized. Thus, del Toro, who was once

known as a cheap-budgeted horror movie director, has successfully elevated his status to a serious filmmaker through being consistent in instilling social and political issues in his fantasy films.

Conclusion

Through applying auteur criticism and other relational critical approaches, *The Shape of Water* can be understood as a whole because the approach acknowledges the importance of creative existences behind films. A cultural perspective allows us to perceive that *The Shape of Water* operates well within the context of American, Mexican, or Spanish film, as well as del Toro's frequently used themes. *The Shape of Water* also has references to the artistic cinematographic styles and influences from other films. The success of del Toro's *The Shape of Water* signifies a consistent set of filmmaking strategies, particularly in terms of the genre and narrative resources from which they derive. I have proposed that del Toro might be known as an "imaginative traditionalist", whose films engage in balancing between the restricting forces of tradition, convention, and reality, as well as the peculiarity and unprecedented "surprises" that the fantasy realm holds. This portion of personal creative intake signals a change of direction in the international fantasy cinema.

Del Toro is also perceived to be successful in instilling monstrous creatures in his films to represent otherness. In *The Shape of Water*, the captured amphibian asset acts as a delegate for the marginalized, whose rights are often uncertain and abused by the ruling government. Although set against the backdrop of the Cold War, the film represents present-day social and political hardships occurring in the United States during the Trump government, which bear many similarities to the one established in the film. It might be plausible to say that the timing of the film release, the director's visionary themes and ideas, the film's uniqueness, as well as its success in receiving high accolades and prestigious film awards contribute to the film's position as an iconic epitome of social critique and movement. I argue that del Toro has successfully positioned himself – through a cross-cultural and transnational framework – as a fantasy auteur, dissociating himself from his counterparts, thereby conveying a new switch in the global fantasy cinema. Furthermore, I also argue that del Toro has successfully maintained the theme of "otherness" in his latest film and established it as a social movement against all kinds of oppression.

Acknowledgements

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Black Struggle Film Production:
Meta-Synthesis of Black Struggle Film Production and Critique Since the Millennium

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Abstract

The film industry has historically wrestled with consistently producing representative and innovative Black American wide release feature length theatrical films. The limited quantity of films containing a majority Black cast and films with a Black protagonist allows for exploration of the similarities between such films. "Black struggle films," films focusing on historic or overt racial, ethnic, or social challenges, appear to be one of the few sorts of films cast, led, and produced by Black American creatives. In addition, Black struggle films appear to be more critically acclaimed and recognized than any other sort of Black film. This investigation is part of a case study on the attributes and successes of Black struggle film production. This article focuses on budget, distribution, and other production variables of Black American films released in the last 20 years. Additionally, a meta-synthesis was performed comparing film critiques of one wide-released, theatrical Black struggle film with other Black films. Film critiques were analyzed using a thematic analytical method to identify themes about their production patterns. The findings of this study will allow media researchers to identify trends in Black American film production and influence producers to engage in strategic and representative production of films that document Black experiences.

Keywords: Black struggle film, African American, American film history, White guilt, White savior film, Oscar bait

There has been much criticism about the recent 2018 film *Green Book* (Burke & Farrelly, 2018). *Green Book* was named after the *Negro Motorist Green Book* which helped guide African Americans to welcoming destinations across the racially segregated mid-20th century United States (Negro Motorist Green Book, 1936). The film showcases the relationship between renowned African American pianist Dr Donald Shirley and his Italian American driver and go-to man as they travel through the segregated Deep South. Despite their beliefs that Dr Shirley's life and the *Green Book* (Burke & Farrelly, 2018) are important historical topics, many critics expressed their disdain for the film suggesting it to be racially tone-deaf and misrepresenting (Ide, 2019), historically inaccurate, and faced with issues around talent mishaps and family consent (Wilkinson, 2019). Nevertheless, the film won an Academy Award for the Best Picture and Best Supporting Actor awards.

African Americans encounter misrepresentation in highly distributed film and media yet go to the movies and consume media at rates higher than their White American counterparts (MPAA, 2016; 2017; Nielsen Company, 2018). Overt misrepresentation in media can cause offense (Graves, 1993) as well as lead to audiences having distorted identities and attitudes about the misrepresented group (Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi, 2009), particularly among children (Fischoff, Franco, Gram, Hernandez, & Parker, 1999). African American misrepresentation in film and television is contextualized by investigating the history of African Americans in film.

African American Presence in Film

African Americans in film have faced a nuanced history of tragedy and triumph (Moody, 2016). Blackface and minstrel performances in the 19th century and early 20th century unjustly and satirically depicted African Americans as jovial, childlike, aloof, and brutish slaves, sharecroppers, and criminals (Coleman, 2000). However, Black minstrel shows featuring African American performers also developed opportunistically and used comedy and satire to signify relatable messages of the Black experience to their African American audience (Watkins, 1994).

Black audiences relating to the Black behaviors, perspectives, and experiences provided by Black minstrel shows opened a platform for Black theater and road shows which evolved into race films (Acham, 2004). Race films were predominately African American-cast films during the early twentieth century produced for African American audiences discussing politics, philanthropy, and romance (Gaines, 2001). Race films, funded by private companies and filmmakers outside of the Hollywood system, also served as the only outlet for many African American filmmakers to produce cinematic content (Bowser, Gaines & Musser, 2001; Field, 2015). By the mid-20th century, race films were underfunded and unable to keep up with the technical complexity of sound and color film (Berry et al., 2016). Few films began to showcase African Americans in leading and supporting roles if they were accompanied by a White lead actor(s) (Vider, 2011; Jonas-Fowler, 2018). Sidney Poitier's role as a criminal convict in *The Defiant Ones* (Kramer, 1958) and Hattie McDaniels' role as a servant in *Gone with the Wind* (Selznick & Fleming, 1939) are examples of this practice.

Black representation in film changed as response to American nationalism. Though not void of pushback, during World War II and throughout the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement, the NAACP worked to encourage Hollywood film and television producers to depict people of color more favorably to reduce the critique of American policies and race relations (Vaughn, 2002; Cripps, 2005). While some archetypes such as nannies and servants remained, other roles such as Sidney Poitier's roles as a police detective in *In The Heat of The Night* (Mirisch &

Jewison, 1967) and an educated fiancé of a White woman in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Kramer, 1967) and Bill Cosby's police operative role in *I Spy* (Fine & Friedkin, 1965) represented African American men in highly-regarded careers, generally in a partnership with a White male lead (Vaughn, 2002; Vider, 2011). Duane Jones' role as an educated middle-class leader of a group striving to survive a hoard of zombies in the *Night of the Living Dead* (Hardman & Romero, 1968) pushed the envelope for African American depictions in the horror genre, and in social commentary on race and power (Benshoff, 2000). These partnering roles later became known as interracial buddy films (Vider, 2011, Jonas-Fowler, 2018).

The Civil Rights Movement and the growth of Black power movements and Afrocentrism influenced Blaxploitation cinema beginning in the late 1960s and spanning through the 1980s. (Cha-Jua, 2008). Blaxploitation films reimagined African Americans in a militant, prideful, and powerful positions, featuring protagonists triumphantly prevail over White antagonism. Blaxploitation films spanned different genres including horror, action and fighting, and comedy (Robinson, 1998; Benshoff, 2000). Blaxploitation filmmakers used socioeconomic class as a source of critique in heroism, as many of the protagonists were working class, sometimes criminals, and many antagonists were wealthy (Cha-Jua, 2008). These films told a range of narratives from Vietnam war veterans returning to drug-ridden communities, to Kung Fu films. Films such as *Super Fly* (Shore & Parks, 1972) and *The Mack* (Bernhard & Campus, 1973) were criminal protagonists against major White criminal(s) in the form of "The Man." *Black Gunn* (Heyman & Hartford-Davis, 1972) and *Melinda* (Atkins & Robertson, 1973) told narratives of a Black protagonist new to the middle-class or as a Black government official being subjected by new White peers to exploit the working-class Black communities they recently abandoned.

The period from the early 1980s to the late 1990s witnessed a growth in Black situation and family comedy film and television productions. Television shows such as *The Jeffersons* (Nicholl, 1975)*, Different Strokes* (Cohan, 1978)*, The Cosby Show* (Carsey, 1984)*, Family Matters* (Sandefur, 1989), and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (Walian, 1990) stretched the Black representative paradigm in film and television in terms of family, marriage, wealth, and White-collar career values. However, many of these productions did not provide a realistic portrayal of the average Black lifestyle or family (Coleman, 2000; Dyson, 2003; Jonas-Fowler, 2018).

Hip-hop culture has been heavily implemented within American film (Watkins, 1998). Hip-hop has been closely associated with many attributes including partying (particularly street dancing and DJ-ing), graffiti, fashion (sagging, tattoos, sneakers, etc.), and African American ethnic symbolism (Motley & Henderson, 2007). Hip-hop culture also incorporates critique and commentary on ethnicity, class, and oppression, and often focuses on rebellion from authority (Motley & Henderson, 2007).

Films began to notoriously feature a single or few African American supporting roles to increase visible diversity such as in the "best friend role". Social scientists describe best friend roles as examples of reflective racial ordering, a psychological behavior that occurs daily as individuals develop nuanced color-consciousness reinforced by social standards of power, privilege, and colorblind racism (Turner, 2012; Smith, 2013). It is also suggested that with films of certain contexts (most significantly romantic films) audience members, particularly White audience members, prefer films with the majority same race (Weaver, 2011).

Defining Black Struggle Films

A recent series of films that have garnered critical acclaim and received attention from films awards feature despair in the Black experience (Obsenson, 2018). This series of films will be referred in this article as Black struggle films (BSFs). BSFs are defined as films that focus on the crude conditions uniquely suffered by Black or African American people such as slavery, the fall of reconstruction, convict leasing, segregation, Black racialized ghettos, and hyper-masculine criminology. These Black conditions are almost always portrayed as a deficit rather than in an asset-based perspective, even when the hero is African American. BSFs seem to support "Oscar bait" films: films awarded with Academy Awards that consist of well-acted character-focused drama, often focusing on historic times periods and with people who experience disabilities or despair (Culloty, 2016). BSFs rarely incorporate elements of fantasy genre such as horror, adventure, and Sci-Fi (Moody, 2016).

BSFs have debuted annually, produced with promising revenues and recognition (Golub, 1998). Some of the most recognized and subjectively talented Black talent have worked on BSFs as the films offer a rare opportunity to tell one's own ethnic-grounded story with wide-release production value. BSFs provide many opportunities for up and coming Black talent. Within the past five years, new directors such as Ryan Coogler and Barry Jenkins have earned high critical acclaim for their films predominately starring new and underutilized Black talent in such films as *Black Panther* (Feige & Coogler, 2018), *Fruitvale Station* (Bongiovi & Coogler, 2013), *Creed* (Chartoff, Chartoff, Stallone, & Coogler, 2015), and *Moonlight* (Gardner & Jenkins, 2016), and *If Beale Street Could Talk* (Gardner & Jenkins, 2018) respectively. The success of BSF show that it is possible for Black theatrical arts to reach widespread audiences and be well-received.

BSFs are often examined from a perspective of racial reconciliation. "White guilt films" are films identified to be produced and well-received with mainstream success due to the concept of White guilt (Golub, 1998), which describes the discomfort and guilt-related affect experienced by White people due to self-receptive knowledge of social privilege and membership of a community with a violent and discriminative past (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Spanierman, Todd, & Anderson, 2009). Often times these films feature an anti-racist White hero or "White savior" that counters the malevolent White antagonists (Schultz, 2014; Bineham, 2015; McFarlane, 2015).

General Method

An investigation was conducted to determine descriptive statistics related to Black struggle films and the implications they have on production and criticism. The major research questions were: 1) What are distinguishes different types of Black films?; 2) are BSFs actually over-abundant; and 3) do BSFs have stronger support in terms of budget, revenue, and critique than other Black films? The hypothesis was that that there is a variance in the level of effort that goes into the production of BSFs and that Black films remain genre-limited, with a lack of Black fantasy genres such as adventure, action. Sci-Fi, and horror. A two-study approach study was conducted: 1) a data search to identify BSFs and outline how their attributes compare with other Black films 2) a meta-synthesis of critic reviews on the production and distribution of a selected BSF compared with two other Black films.

Black Struggle Film Search and Analysis

Method
Four film related databases were used while conducting the search for Black struggle films: Internet Movie Database (IMDB), The Numbers by Nash Information Services, LLC, Metacritic by CBS Interactive, Inc., and Rotten Tomatoes by Fandango. Using IMDB, films were identified using the annual listing "feature films released between…". The top 400 films (the list ascends by popularity) were screened to identify theater wide-release Black films; Box Office Mojo suggests on average since 1984 about 146 films are classified as wide release. This process was repeated for each year between 1998 and 2018.

Selection Criteria
For a film to be identified, the film needed to be classified as a Black film. For the purposes of this study, for a film to be a Black film it needed to justify one of the following inclusion criteria: 1) The lead/shared lead character of the film is racially Black; 2) the majority of the cast is racially Black; or 3) a moderate proportion of the cast is racially Black and the subject matter discusses social conditions unique to a Black ethnicity. Each film was identified if they were a Black struggle film (see Introduction, Defining Black Struggle Films) with either a "yes", "moderate", or "no".

From this list a series of details relating to the production of the films were determined. Descriptive statistics of the film including MPAA rating, genre(s), runtime, director(s), writer(s), production studio(s) and domestic (United States) distribution company were identified. Other distribution items included domestic and worldwide gross earnings, budget, and actual earnings of the films were identified. Critique items were also identified which included Rotten Tomato and Metacritic scores and the number of awards received. These data were compared between databases to detect variances.

Results

Black Film Statistics
A total of 54 films were omitted because they were either not released in theaters or they did not have a wide theatrical release; 318 Black films were identified. Proportionately, 4.43% of wide-release theatrical films released in the United States between 1998–2018 were Black films. 37.3% of Black films had a moderate to predominantly Black cast. The genres of Black films by descending order of frequency were drama (180), comedies (162), crime (96), action (79), romance (54), biography (39), thriller (36), adventure (31), family (26), sport (24), music (22), history (21), horror (15), Sci-Fi (11), and animation (3) (see Figure 1). Black films typically range in worldwide gross earnings from $96,793 to $1,348,258,244 ($M$=$91,504,032, SD=$128.5m, Med=$49,155,371), with budgets ranging from $500,000 to $215,000,000 ($M$=$36,329.783 , SD=$35.9m, Med=$25,000,000), with a range of -$92,905,005 to $1,148,258,224 ($M$=$59,758,334, SD=$104.9m, Med=$28,000,000) in actual earnings. Black films online critic scores (Rotten Tomato audience and critic scores and Metacritic scores) range from 10.7 to 93.7 (M=51.5, SD=18.9, Med=49.7). The average Black film received 6.9 awards with no Academy Award or Golden Globe nominations or wins, however the median Black film received 1 award.
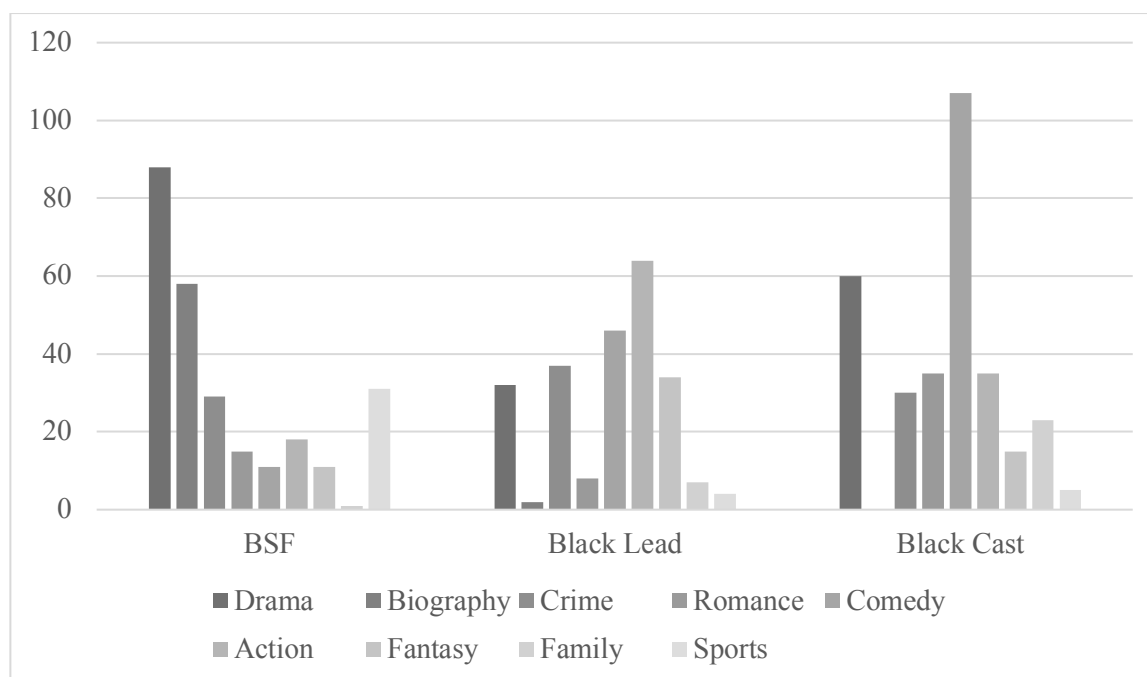
Figure 1: Frequency of Genres in Black Films

Biography consists of biographies and films depicted in a clear historical era. Sport films include sport and music films. Fantasy consisted of adventure films, animation, mystery, Sci-Fi, and horror. All genres were classified by IMDB and Metacritic. Black films were classified as a BSF, a non-BSF featuring a majority Black cast, or a non-BSF featuring a Black lead with a majority non-Black cast. These data represent the amount per genre Black films produced for theatrical wide-release between 1998-2018. Most films featured multiple genres.

Black Struggle Film Statistics
Of the 318 identified Black films, 28.3% (90) are BSFs (see Figure 2). A total of 78 (86.7%) of BSFs had a moderate to majority Black cast. The breakdown of BSF genres in descending order is as follows: drama (88), biography (37), crime (29), history (21), sport (16), music (15), romance (11), comedy (9), action (8), thriller (8), adventure (2), family (1), and horror (1) (see Figure 2). There were no wide-released theatrical animated or Sci-Fi BSFs. BSFs ranged in having worldwide gross earnings from \$254,293 to \$449,948,323 (M=\$70,045,456, SD=\$87.4m Med=\$31,609,243), with budgets ranging from \$500,000 to \$109,000,000 (M=\$28,498,026, SD=\$23.8m, Med=\$23,000,000). BSF have average online critic scores (Rotten Tomato audience and critic and Metacritic) ranging from 10.7 to 93.7 (M=67.9, SD=14.5, Med=69.33). The average BSF received 18 awards with 1 Academy Award and Golden Globe nomination, however the median BSF received 6 awards.
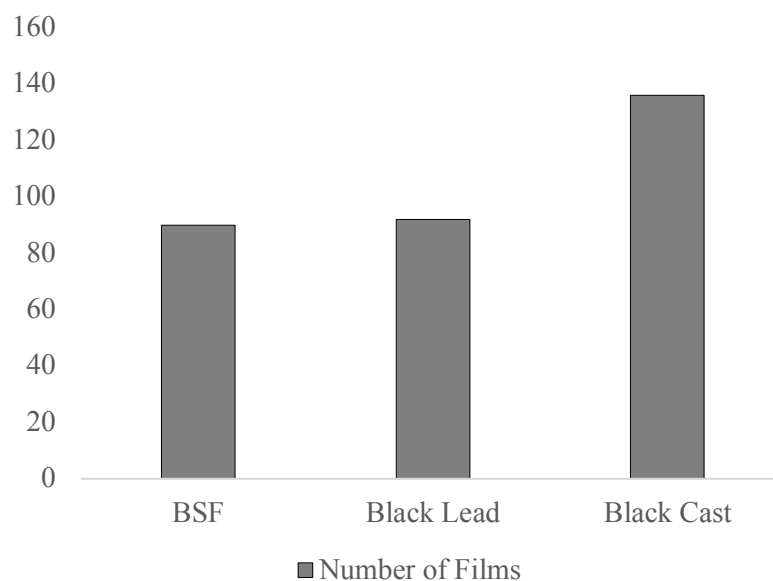
Figure 2: Frequency of Black Film Production.

Black films were classified as a BSF, a non-BSF featuring a majority Black cast, or a non-BSF featuring a Black lead with a majority non-Black cast. These data represent the amount of Black films produced for theatrical wide-release between 1998–2018.

Discussion

From a historical perspective, the films identified follow a similar pattern supported by the literature. Comedy and drama still remain the two most prominent produced Black films, reflecting Black minstrelsy and the race films of the silent era (Acham, 2004, Caddoo, 2014). Comedy and drama have made progressed as a means of Black uplift and expression at a magnitude far greater than other genres, though it is import and for Black narratives to expand across genres. As many of the 92 Black led films were partnered with other ethnicities as protagonists, namely White men on action comedies, on such films as the *Rush Hour* series (Birnbaum & Ratner, 1998; 2002; 2007), *Men In Black* series (MacDonald & Sonnenfeld, 2002; 2012), *Kangaroo Jack* (Bruckheimer & McNally, 2003), *Taxi* (Besson & Story, 2004), *Pain and Gain* (Bay, 2013), *Let's Be Cops* (Greenfield, 2014), and *Green Book* (Burke & Farrelly, 2018), it is clear that biracial buddy films are still produced, mimicking dynamics in the 1960s, despite critique and progression within the subgenre (Vider, 2011; Jonas-Fowler, 2018). The depiction of the Black family experienced a series of changes throughout the last 20 years beginning with some of the 1990s glorified nuclear family on such films as *Doctor Dolittle* (Davis & Thomas, 1998) and *The Haunted Mansion* (Gunn & Minkoff, 2003) followed by a wave of dramatic critiques in family relationships in such films as films from Tyler Perry, *Woman Thou Art Loose* (Cannon & Schultz, 2004), *ATL* (Austin & Robibson, 2006), and *Sparkle* (Akil, 2012) (Dyson, 2003; Jonas-Fowler, 2018). Elements of Blaxploitation and spoof continue to exist mainly in the genre of comedy including many of the films from the Wayans Brothers, *Death at a Funeral* (Horberg & LaBute, 2010), and *Meet the Blacks* (Angelone & Taylor, 2016), as well as remaking and glorifying the Blaxploitation era in such films as *Chi-Raq* (Lee, 2015), and *SuperFly* (Silver & X, 2018) (Benshoff, 2000). Additionally, Hip-hop has influenced the film industry by introducing recurring talent and producers such as Ice Cube, 50 Cent, and T.I. as well as showcasing successful and serious biographical material and

narratives in such films as *Straight Out of Compton* (Gary, 2015), and *Blindspotting* (Calder & Estrada, 2018) as well as influencing the protagonist Miles Morales in the highly-acclaimed animated *Spider-man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Pascal, Persichetti, Ramsey, & Rothman, 2018).

BSFs, though not significantly provided with or having the ability to pursue higher budgets or earning higher revenue, are successful at earning awards upwards to six times the amount of the typical Black film (Golub, 1998; Culloty, 2016). Though it may seem as if there is an overabundance of historic nationalistic films of Black despair, most BSFs were strictly dramatic featuring current Black struggles and crime. This fact reshapes the narrative, if accurate, of a White guilt discomfort of the past to a White guilt discomfort of the present (Golub, 1998). Regardless, race and ethnic consciousness definitely comes into play in while exploring many of the BSFs which feature White savior lead characters such as Dakota Fanning in *Secret Life of Bees* (Lassiter & Prince-Bythewood, 2008) and Emma Stone in *The Help* (Columbus & Taylor, 2011), as well as color-consciousness and racial order such as with Josh Lucas in *Glory Road* (Bruckheimer & Gartner, 2006) (Schultz, 2014), Sandra Bullock in *The Blind Side* (Johnson & Hancock, 2009) (Bineham, 2015), and Sylvester Stallone in *Creed II* (Chartoff, Stallone, & Caple, 2018).

Limitations

Identifying films as a BSF is not a validated or structured practice. Though there were objective features such as historical context despair condition, movements, athleticism, etc.) drama genre, and despair unique to the Black community, at the bottom line it was selected by the author. Films were identified as not BSF, moderate BSF, and BSF. Both moderate BSF and BSF were used to calculate descriptive statistics. As a result many films, particularly biographical films, that were classified as only having moderate BSF elements were included in the BSF group. No interrater reliability was practiced. Award nominations outside of the Academy Awards and Golden Globes were not included, therefore there were films that were nominated to quite a few awards but were identified as having no awards due to no wins. There were also quite a few budgets that were reported as "estimated" or were not accessible. Inaccessible budgets were not included in the comparative analysis. All films with accurate information were included in the analysis; no outlier films were removed, giving reason to provide both the mean and median for clarity. Ultimately, the online database sources may provide inaccurate information, particularly with budgets; thus exact descriptive statistics should be used with caution.

Black Film Production and Critique Synthesis

Method

The selected Black struggle film was the 2015 film entitled *Selma* (Colson & DuVernay, 2014). The film was directed by Ava DuVernay and focused on Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and his efforts to bring voting rights to the people of Selma, Alabama and other areas in the Deep South of the United States. This film was compared with two other Black films: 1) *Changing Lanes* (2002), a representative Black lead film about a lawyer and a businessman's escalating feud after encountering a minor car accident; and 2) *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (2008), a representative predominately Black film about a talk show host visiting his Southern family after years of abandonment. These three films were selected by the author to represent each Black film sub-type with a film of a mid-ranged reported budget, awarded recognition, genre, Black representation, and reported revenue per respective sub-type. Three online critic

databases were used to identify film critic reviews: Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, and YouTube. All critic reviews were identified with a single search term: *Selma*.

Selection Criteria
One hundred eighty-three critic reviews were identified and screened to ensure the review specifically focused on the three films, 63 for *Selma* (Colson & DuVernay, 2014), 51 for *Changing Lanes* (Rudin & Michell, 2002), and 49 for *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008). Production items including any mention on the film's budget and studio constraints, revenue, release timing, and other general statements were identified. The selection criteria excluded critic reviews with: 1) no mention of the previously stated production items; 2) had no in-depth critique of the production or distribution or only spoke on the talent and creative output; 3) and reviews with no clear assessment or grade. Video critiques from notable YouTube influencers (over 20,000 views, over 800,000 subscribers) were included if they followed the selection criteria, as these reviewers have influential opinions and represent a substantial following.

Data extraction and quality appraisal
Production critique data was extracted from the critic reviews and synthesized into themes to formulate theoretical constructs. Firstly, the Quality Appraisal Form developed from Atkins et al (2008) was adopted to support film critic reviews as opposed to qualitative research articles (see Table 1). Qualifying critic reviews were then officially included in the synthesis. A qualitative thematic synthesis method was conducted for construct development. Contextual themes were direct inductive themes from the reviews. Contradicting themes were contextual themes with conflicting messages. Theoretical-analytical constructs were recommendations provided to produce Black struggle films determined by analyzing and synthesizing the constructs and literature suggestions.

Adopted Atkins et al. (2008) Quality Appraisal Form Questions

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 1. Is this study film critical review?
 2. Are the major critical points clearly stated?
 3. Is the approach to determining these major critical points clearly justified?
 4. Is the critique approach appropriate for elaborating on the critical points?
 5. Is the film context clearly described?
 6. Is the role of the film critic clearly described?
 7. Is the context in which the critic viewed the film and came to conclusions clearly described?
 8. Is this context appropriate for the major critical points?
 9. Is the method of data collection clearly described?
 10. Is the data collection method appropriate to the critical points?
 11. Is the method of analysis clearly described?
 12. Is the analysis appropriate for comping to the conclusion about the critical points?
 13. Are the claims made supported by sufficient evidence?

Note. The quality appraisal form questions verify the quality of a film critic review and were answered by the author for each of the eight selected critic reviews. The adaptation to the quality appraisal question proved challenging to adopt to film reviews as many questions were not answered leaving less than stellar quality appraisal scores. However, each selected review featured contributions to the intended content being researched.

Table 1: Quality Appraisal for Critic Reviews

Results

All selected reviews had justified components with a clearly described role of the critic. All reviews provide supporting evidence for their claims on the production and distribution rollout. Critic reviews were identified with the initial identification process (see Figure 3).

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┌──────────────────────────────┐
│  Searched: 163 non-duplicate │
│      critic reviews          │
└──────────────────────────────┘
               │
               ▼
┌──────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Applied inclusion criteria│──────▶│ 146 critic reviews excluded   │
└──────────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────────────┘
               │                                  │
               │                                  ▼
               │            ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
               │            │ 62 only made general critiques on production│
               │            │ 53 did not include any production or       │
               │            │ distribution information; only included    │
               │            │ narrative critique                         │
               │            │ 31 only mentioned budget, release timing, OR│
               │            │ production details                         │
               │            └────────────────────────────────────────────┘
               ▼
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│ 17 critic reviews included│
└──────────────────────────┘
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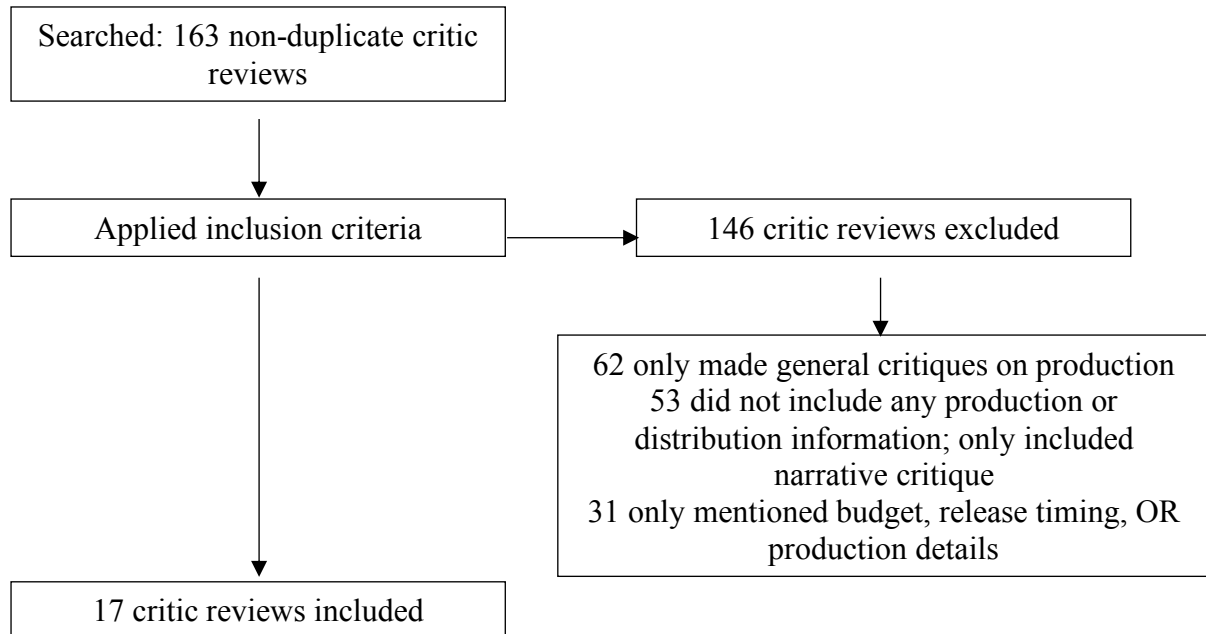
Figure 3: Flow diagram of film critique inclusion process. The diagram represents the exclusion process of identified and screened film critic reviews.

After the full text screening process, eight critic reviews were included in the synthesis review for *Selma* (Colson & DuVernay, 2014). Seven articles were from independent companies and one was from a YouTube influencer (see Table 2). Two reviews had vague mention of production development details. Six reviews from critics representing independent companies were selected for the Black lead film *Changing Lanes* (Rudin & Michell, 2002). Three critical reviews from independent companies were selected for *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008). All *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008) reviews provided relatively vague details on production development.

Film	Name	Company/Organization	Review	Film Score
Selma	Andrew O'Hehir	Salon	article	100
Selma	Grace Randolph	Beyond the Trailer	video	95
Selma	David Denby	The New Yorker	article	90
Selma	Josh Larsen	LarsenOnFilm	article	88
Selma	Michael Phillips	Chicago Tribune	article	88
Selma	Chris Hewitt	Empire	article	80
Selma	Richard Corliss	Time	article	80
Selma	Liam Lacey	The Globe and Mail (Toronto)	article	75
Changing Lanes	Robert Koehler	Variety	article	90
Changing Lanes	Mick LaSalle	SFGate	article	75
Changing Lanes	Nev Pierce	BBC	article	80
Changing Lanes	Screenit.com	ScreenIt	article	75
Changing Lanes	Desson Howe	Washington Post	article	80
Changing Lanes	Moira Macdonalds	Seattle Times	article	88
Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins	Wesley Morris	Boston.com	article	25
Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins	Elizabet Weitzman	Daily News	article	50
Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins	Walter Addiego	SFGate	article	25

Note. Seventeen critic reviews were selected for analysis. This table lists the film of discussion, name of the critic, organization they represent, format of the critique, and the score they provided to the respective film.

Table 2: Selected Critic Reviews

Contextual Constructs

Four codes were determined before reviewing the identified critic reviews: budget, revenue, release timing, and picking up the project. No critic reviews mentioned the revenue of the film. Critics discussed the limited budget of $20 million and how it was not enough to purchase the expensive rights to Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches guarded tightly by his family estate. It was also mentioned that, even the budget was not exhaustive, the film still featured a large cast of prominent Black actors willing to perform despite the low pay. A few critics believed the marketing campaign for both award season and for the general public were poor stating that "seeing Selma based on the advertising material seems like a chore; it seems like a TV movie...that's so totally a rental and this is so not totally a rental-type of movie" (Randolph, 2014). According to the critics, Selma was released at an advantageous and meaningful time. *Selma* (Colson & DuVernay, 2014) benefited from following after the well-received *Lincoln* (Kennedy & Spielberg, 2012) – a film featuring a historical hero during a specific period of their life – and *12 Years A Slave* (McQueen, 2013) produced by the same company (Plan B Entertainment). *12 Years A Slave* (McQueen, 2013) also featured a Black American historical narrative directed by an up-and-coming Black director and featuring a predominantly Black cast, many of whom were of Black British ethnicity. The film also was released at a time of

racial hostility in the United States with the untimely deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown at the hands of police, the rise of the Black Lives matter movement, and contentious regulation changes to voter ID. It was also the 50th anniversary of the voting demonstrations in Selma, Alabama. Other critics discussed how the film was picked from a wandering screenplay written by Paul Webb. The director, Ava DuVernay, is a Black American filmmaker who at the time had two independent intimate character drama feature films using her skill set with her first big budget feature to ground the epic narrative of King. As studio proprietors are claimed to have agendas in their selling points, DuVernay integrated classic theatrical narrative with the support of independent, big name actor-producers including Oprah Winfrey and Brad Pitt.

The selected critics reviews did not mention the projected revenue of *Changing Lanes* (Rudin & Michell, 2002). Critics noted the film was picked up with a big budget due to its high concept nature. A few critics compared the high concept film to a recent film they felt was similar in that regard such as Sam Raimi's *A Simple Plan* (Jacks & Raimi, 1998). Critics also highlighted the new and fresh screenwriter being supported by a seasoned co-writer that built anticipation for the film. In general, critics credited the film's notability and ability to take off due to the two lead actors; the very experienced Samuel L. Jackson and the decent celebrity actor Ben Affleck: *"[Changing Lanes] may put off a portion of Affleck's fan base while fully satisfying Jackson's"* (Koehler, 2002, para. 1).

No critic review mentioned the budget of *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008). Only one review mentioned revenue suggesting it was as expected for this kind of film. Critics believed the project was developed primarily due to the director Malcolm D. Lee's positive track record and having a line of successful Black comedians on board. Response to the film was varied, with a few participants referring to the project as a film produced because Lee had already "gotten all the sweetness out of his system" (Weitzman, 2008, para. 2) with previous films. Critics also suggest this film ties the crude Blaxploitation humor from Lee's *Undercover Brother* (Lee & Lee, 2002) and romance charm from Lee's *The Best Man* (Carraro & Lee, 1999). Consequently, critics referred to the films content as a bit outdated. A critic explicitly stated the film "isn't the recipe for an award winner, but it will feed crowds hungry for a good time" (Weitzman, 2008, para. 2).

Contradictory Constructs

Critics mentioned the film should "sweep the Oscars" due to the stellar performances, strong direction, and social relevance. However, a few critics mentioned the lead actor and director were not nominated. These themes are not contradictory because one perspective is a projection while the other is reported, yet the disparity between critic projection and Academy nomination is notable. It is not clear why the film was not nominated, though it does reinforce the idea that the Academy Awards has biases in film types. This supports the data of Black Struggle Films receiving substantially more awards than other Black films. There were no contradictory themes for the selected Black lead film or the predominately Black film.

Theoretical-Analytical Constructs & Discussion

Critique of the production and distribution of *Selma* (Colson & DuVernay, 2014) is representative of the findings of Black filmmaking literature and findings from the data search. Just as race films were groundbreaking, this film took a nuanced, authentic approach and incorporated a predominantly Black cast and Black director. As Caddoo notes: "If Hollywood was waiting, consciously or otherwise, for a Black filmmaker to come along who could handle

this topic, then Ava DuVernay (who spent many years working as a film publicist, and has made only two previous features) was worth the wait" (2014).

As a film taking place during the Civil Rights Movement, its progressive admiration is interestingly similar to that of the improvement of Black depictions encouraged by the NAACP during the actual Civil Rights Movement (Jonas-Fowler, 2018). White guilt admiration may be a factor, however White saviorism was challenged as there are no particular White saviors depicted in the film (Bineham, 2015; McFarlane, 2015). The two closest would be James Reeb, a minister who died after traveling to Selma to fight for voting rights alongside King, and Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ), the president who signed the Voting Rights Act. In scenes featuring King and Johnson, a buddy-film relationship appears to exist, but not consistent enough and diluted with other subplots further marginalizing LBJ's role in the fight for justice (Vider, 2011). This marginalization of LBJ brought criticism which may be somewhat accurate or could be a response to the reduction of what should have been the White savior role. The role of the Black family was handled quite realistically and in a nuanced manner, featuring threat, infidelity, support, and openness unlike the Black sitcom era (Dyson, 2003; Jonas-Fowler, 2018). Hip-hop culture (and of course authority rebellion) is sprinkled throughout the film's marketing material highlighting its signature track "Glory" performed by rapper and actor Common and John Legend (Motley & Henderson, 2007). The film focused on historical accounts where Black Americans faced ethnic-specific adversity lacking fantastical features and received two Academy Awards, supporting the Oscar bait notion (Culloty, 2016). Though the $20 million budget was not extensive, the film received strong recognition and a revenue earning over $66 million.

Unlike BSFs and predominately Black films, *Changing Lanes* (Rudin & Michell, 2002) has a high-concept for a drama thriller. Critics mentioned how the depiction of Samuel L. Jackson's character had depth, a role rare for Black characters in films where they are the minority (Smith, 2013): "Jackson, playing the entire movie as a man on the verge of desperation and utter collapse, has an aching close-up at the end. He makes us believe, despite everything, in goodness" (Macdonald, 2002, para. 7). *Changing Lanes* (Rudin & Michell, 2002) plays like an interracial buddy film with a darker morale.

On the other hand, *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008) lacked critical commentary; in fact, many critics were rather dismissive. The film's childlike humor and satirically flat characters were continually compared to Black minstrelsy by critics (Acham, 2004). A more in-depth look into the origins of the genre come from critics' comparisons to Lee's previous films *The Best Man* (Carraro & Lee, 1999) (romantic drama), *Undercover Brother* (Lee & Lee, 2002) (Blaxploitation comedy), and *Roll Bounce* (Tillman & Lee, 2005) (music drama). Many inspiration of the Black sitcom era of the 1980s and 1990s inspired the plot beats, character types, and romantic interests in this family-oriented over-the-top comedy (Dyson, 2003). Lee's work on *The Best Man* (Carraro & Lee, 1999) debuted during the end of this era. The post-Blaxploitation elements of both *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008) and *Undercover Brother* (Lee & Lee, 2002) harness the fighting and comedy integrated with the Black pride and triumph motifs of the Blaxploitation era films (Robinson, 1998). The character of Roscoe resembles the common Blaxploitation protagonist of the newly middle-class (in this case upper-middle class) Black protagonist returning to the working-class country he abandoned (Cha-Jua, 2008). Hip-hop music and culture were not explicitly used throughout the film, unlike many of its contemporaries (Motley & Henderson, 2007). Instead, *Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins* (Stuber & Lee, 2008) used the soul, funk, and R&B genres throughout the soundtrack to resemble a traditional Black American family reunion. The usage

of these musical genres increased its resemblance to Blaxploitation films (Robinson, 1998). As predicted by a critic, the film did not receive many awards. However, it is unclear if this was due to the lack of technical and nontechnical achievement of the film or if it is due to the genre choice.

Limitations

Due to the use of quality appraisal and critic reviews, findings are insufficiently generalizable. Online film critics' credibility varies. It was challenging accessing online reviews as many of the pages have been taken down or the link did not function, particularly with the two older films. There could be differences between critical perception and awarding of films across the timespan that remained undetected.

Conclusion

BSFs offer many beneficial attributes such as introducing new, great talent in front of and behind the camera. Historical BSFs also introduced significant moments from the past that helped shape new generations and promote new talent. On the other hand, BSFs often portray the Black experience with a focus on deficit, rather than from positive perspectives. This deficit portrayal leads to the misrepresentation of contextual conditions and existing privileges. Encompassing only a fourth of all Black films created, the quantity of the films is not necessarily the issue, rather the lack of critically qualifying Black films. General and representative critical and production support is needed for Black films in existing genres, as well in fantasy genres.

This review answered many assumptions on the production of Black films yet raised even more questions. There were clear disparities between critic reviews and audience reviews, particularly with Black comedies, leaving much to be explored particularly in the area of scoring where, more often than not, critic scores averaged much lower than audience scores. Additionally, a substantial amount of the awards received by films were at Black competitions. Further investigation is required to clearly detect the weight that Black awards have on the majority of the identified Black films and how many awards the films receive without these underrepresented minority platforms. Many Black lead films featured the same handful of Black leads such as Will Smith, Samuel L. Jackson, and Denzel Washington. Often, predominately Black film featured large concentrations of notable Black actors. As discussed with *Selma* (Colson & DuVernay, 2014), what are the implications of being able to cast so many notable Black actors in miniscule roles, and why isn't there a more rapid turnaround rate for new talent.

Future investigations within this case study plan to observe the other areas in the production including pre-production, writing, talent scouting, directing, marketing and distribution. Additionally, future studies plan to determine trends and changes in the types of Black films developed throughout the last 21 years.

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Memory Politics and Popular Culture –
The Example of the United Red Army in the Manga *Red* (2006–2018)

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Abstract

Serialized in a period of booming popular interest for the United Red Army (URA), *Red* (2006–2018) by manga artist Yamamoto Naoki (1960–) is to this day the most thoroughly detailed and researched work of fiction drawing on the famous Japanese terrorist group. In the present article, we would like to address how Yamamoto is fully engaged in a memory struggle regarding the "truth" of the historical event – he has been active in the "Association to transmit the overall picture of the United Red Army incident," a group involved in the gathering and publishing of testimonies surrounding the incident, bringing to the fore until then unknown and neglected details of the URA. And yet, serialized in the *seinen* manga magazine *Evening*, *Red* constitutes at the same time a genuine piece of popular culture, fostering narrative and visual devices aimed at a large audience (for instance, all the characters appear with false and dramatized names – Nagata Hiroko becoming Akagi or "Red Castle" Hiroko – and the ideological motivations are all downplayed in favor of more sanitized and universal ones). By so doing, Yamamoto succeeds in reshaping the popular memory of the URA, but we argue that this reworking is made at the expense of the political and social background of the organization, with the result of hindering our social and historical understanding of this foundational event of contemporary Japan politics.

Keywords: memory, politics, manga, United Red Army, 1968

Introduction

In the present article, we would like to address a critical issue regarding the representation of memory politics in popular culture, that is, the way complex and potentially divisive historical events are mediated and turned into widely accessible narratives through the use of mass media. We will take as an example the manga *Red* (*Reddo*) by author Yamamoto Naoki (1960–). Serialized between 2006 and 2018 in the bi-weekly *seinen* magazine *Evening*[1]*, Red* constitutes the first adaptation into comics of the story of the United Red Army (URA), a Japanese revolutionary organization infamously known for the torture and the killing of fourteen of its own members during the years 1971–72[2]. As with previous fictionalized accounts of the incident, *Red* espouses a historically grounded perspective, relying extensively on first-hand sources – including interviews of former members by Yamamoto himself – to recreate the atmosphere and the sequence of events which led to the murders. However, unlike its counterparts, it departs from a depiction of Nagata and Mori – the two main leading figures of the URA – to focus instead on the feelings and activities of rank and file members. In this sense, Yamamoto's work constitutes an important change in the representations of the URA, foregrounding for the first time a decentered and diversified account where political, ideological, and theoretical aspects are all downplayed in favor of more ordinary ones. This shift is in part due to the format of the manga: as a series, it is composed of more than one hundred and fifty chapters – which amount to a total of thirteen volumes in the *tankôbon* or book version published by Kôdansha[3] – and is able to deal with more trivial episodes. However, and more significantly, this shift is also the result of a turn in the way Japanese society has remembered and perceived the terrorist group in recent years. Indeed, in stark contrast to previous accounts whose authors had clear and intimate motives to tackle the incident, Yamamoto, born in 1960, was too young to participate in the 1968 student protests and belongs to a more depoliticized generation[4]. This lack of personal and political commitment is expressed in the interview the author gave for the magazine *Yuriika* in 2018, confessing that the incident did not leave a great impression on him as a kid:

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[1] *Seinen* refers to publications aimed at young male adults.

[2] The URA formed in July 1971 as a result of the merger of two far-left organizations, the Red Army Faction (*Sekigun-ha*) and the Revolutionary Left Faction (*Kakumei sa-ha*). The first killings occurred in August 1971, when two members of the RLF – Haiki Yasuko (1950–1971) and Mukaiyama Shigenori (1951–1971) – were executed for having deserted the mountain camp in Yamanashi Prefecture where the organization had retreated to undergo military training. The other twelve victims died in the mountain of Gunma Prefecture between December 31, 1971 and February 12, 1972 after having been subjected to physical violence and critical self-examination – in Japanese, *sôkatsu* – with the aim of transforming them into better revolutionary soldiers. The purge eventually stopped after the arrests of leaders Mori Tsuneo (1944–1973) and Nagata Hiroko (1945–2011) on February 17, which in turn led to the near collapse of the organization and the Asama Lodge standoff where two policemen and a civilian were also killed. For a detailed account of the incident in English see Steinhoff (1992).

[3] *Red* was published in three different parts covering respectively the daily activities of the group up to the retreat in the mountain, the *sôkatsu* killings themselves, and the Asama Lodge incident. Part one (eight volumes) is entitled *Red 1969–1972*, part two (four volumes) *Red 1969–1972: the Last Sixty Days, Then Towards the Asama Lodge*, and part three (one volume) *Red 1969–1972 Final Chapter: Ten Days in the Asama Lodge*.

[4] *United Red Army*'s director Wakamatsu Kôji (1936–2012) had for instance personal links with some members of the Japanese Red Army – an offspring of the Red Army Faction – and knew directly Tôyama Mieko (1946–1972), one of the victim (Takasaki, 2008, p. 37); though not a member of any political organization, *Rain of Light*'s author Tatematsu Wahei (1947–2010) did take an active part in the 1968 student protest (Nakagami et al., 1984, p. 23); and filmmaker Takahashi Banmei (1949–), author of Tatematsu's novel cinematographic adaptation, was a student activist at the time and knew personally Yamazaki Jun'ichi (1950–1972), another member killed during the *sôkatsu* (Arai & Adachi, 2008, p. 86).

> I was a sixth grade elementary school student. I guess I must have seen it [the incident] on television and so forth but, to tell you the truth, it didn't stick out in my mind. I was too absorbed by the 1972 Winter Olympics held in Sapporo (laughs) (Yamamoto, 2018a, p. 25).

In another interview carried out in 2008, Yamamoto also confirmed his lack of ideological interest in the incident, arguing that "when filtered out of its ideological elements, the [URA] story becomes an extremely compelling one" (Yamamoto & Kirino, 2008, p. 169). As a manga artist primarily known for his erotic and subversive series – his manga *BLUE* was deemed "harmful" and censored in 1992 (Kinsella, 2000, pp. 149–150) – and whose concern lies principally with outsiders and people living on the fringes of society – see for instance *Believers* (1999) – Yamamoto can be considered a rather left-leaning author with sympathetic feelings to the URA. Nevertheless, his reading remains unpolitical and does not seek to address in a critical manner the impact the incident had and is still having on Japanese society. His perspective may thus be better understood as one of a *renseki mania* or "URA enthusiast" (Yamamoto & Yanagi, 2012, p. 97), that is, of someone particularly invested in collecting and knowing facts about the incident but alienated from its deeper, political significance[5].

This particular perspective reflects both positively and negatively in the manga. On the one hand, *Red* appears as the most exhaustive visual account of the incident to date, shedding new light on unknown or overlooked aspects of the killings and giving the readers a more contrasted picture than previously existing representations. Its faithfulness to the "facts" helps explain why the "Association to Transmit the Overall Picture of the United Red Army Incident" has endorsed it publicly and why former member Uegaki Yasuhiro (1949–), in the afterword to the last volume, felt compelled to praise it for its historical accuracy[6]. The relationship between Yamamoto and former members as well as the narrative perspective espoused by *Red* are discussed in the first part, "*Red* as Memory Politics."

On the other hand, the manga's depoliticized and decentered perspective gives priority to what appears throughout the story as weak and helpless victims, and tends to remove key information regarding the ideological context. The result is that though detailed and faithful as possible to known facts, it ultimately fails to convey the complex dynamic which led to the deadly series of *sôkatsu* and ends up sanitizing the memory of the URA. It is no wonder, then, if the manga was *also* officially approved by the Japanese government, receiving the prize of excellence at the 2010 Japan Media Arts Festival and thereby confirming that the rehabilitation of the incident was underway at the expense of its political significance[7]. The narrative and visual devices through which *Red* negotiates the complex and politically charged memory of the URA incident is addressed in the second part, "*Red*, or the Rehabilitation of the URA's Memory."

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[5] For another example see *shôjo* culture theorist and manga artist Ôtsuka Eiji (1958–) and his manga *Unlucky Youngmen* (2004–2006). For a comparative study of *Red* and *Unlucky Youngmen* see Bouvard (2018).

[6] "The great achievement of this work is that it refuses creative elements that take no account of the truth" (*kono sakuhin no sugoi tokoro wa, jijitsu o mushi shita sôsaku ga mochikomareteinai koto de aru*)" (Yamamoto, 2018c, p. 298).

[7] The Festival is held annually by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, a special body of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

***Red* as Memory Politics**

***Red* and Previous Fictional Accounts of the URA**
Red's serialization began in 2006 in the midst of a wave of counter-memory surrounding the URA incident, with the publication of the novel *Rain of Light* (Tatematsu, 1998), the release of its cinematographic adaptation of the same name (Takahashi, 2001), and the production of docudrama movie *United Red Army* (Wakamatsu, 2007). As mentioned in the introduction, Tatematsu, Wakamatsu and Takahashi are all authors with personal connections to either the URA or the 1968 student movement.

Until the successful publication of *Rain of Light* in 1998, accounts from the perspective of the URA were still sparse, and the fictional representation of the incident considered as taboo and risky topics. The serialization of Tatematsu's novel was for instance discontinued for plagiarism in 1993, and the editorial board as well as the author were asked to apologize publicly (Tatematsu, 1994, pp. 315–317). One of the decisive factors behind the formation of the first period of cultural remembrance has been the publication of accounts by leaders or people in positions of command at the time of the incident. Former Central Committee (CC) members Nagata Hiroko, Bandô Kunio and Sakaguchi Hiroshi have indeed published their autobiographies and versions of the event respectively in 1984 and 1993–1995[8]. These first-hand accounts have in turn fueled the first wave of counter-memory. Based on Sakaguchi's account, *Rain of Light* – both novel and film – may be considered as critical responses addressing the movie *Banquet of the Beasts* (Kumakiri, 1997) and its sexualized representation of the incident, and *United Red Army*, inspired by Bandô's account (Arai & Adachi, 2008, p. 87), was produced in reaction to *The Choice of Hercules* (Harada, 2002) and its depiction of the URA as a group of "faceless monsters" (Perkins, 2015, p. 102). Two major characteristics can be drawn from this first wave of cultural counter-memory: first, its main concern is to introduce the event from the perspective of the URA in the face of a highly antagonistic cultural environment and, second, it is aimed at articulating a rationale for the killings. As a consequence, all these fictional accounts espouse the view of people in command at the time of the event and use a fair amount of time to introduce the political situation – words like "communist transformation" (*kyôsanshugi-ka*) or "death by defeatism" (*haiboku-shi*) are for instance explained at length[9] – rather than depicting the more basic and daily activities of the group. By comparison, *Red* gives a greater attention to lower-rank militants and is more interested in everyday life aspects of the URA than in the killing *per se*.

Both *Rain of Light* and *United Red Army* centers on the murders and espouse the perspective of leaders Mori and Nagata, or of CC members Sakaguchi and Bandô[10]. This is evident in the way they introduce their narrative, through a condensed history of the Japanese New Left for *Rain of Light* (film) and *United Red Army*, and through the robbery of the Mooka gun store for *Rain of Light* (novel), a decisive event which is at the origin of Revolutionary Left Faction (RLF)'s decision to retreat back into the mountain. By contrast, *Red* expresses from the beginning its indifference towards the murders and the top-leading figures. The manga starts with Iwaki Yasuhiro (Uegaki Yasuhiro in real life) attending a political meeting at Hirosaki

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[8] The CC of the URA, formed on January 3, 1972, was composed of the following members: Mori Tsuneo, Yamada Takashi (1944–1972), Nagata Hiroko, Sakaguchi Hiroshi (1946–), Bandô Kunio (1947–), Teraoka Kôichi (1948–1972), and Yoshino Masakuni (1948–).

[9] For an analysis of the social function of these terms see Steinhoff (1992).

[10] The novel *Rain of Light* is narrated from Sakaguchi's perspective years after the end of the event, and *United Red Army* relies extensively on Nagata and Mori's point-of-view shots for the *sôkatsu* scenes. For a detailed analysis of the latter see Perkins (2015, pp. 112–117).

University (Aomori Prefecture) in the summer of 1969. The scene, unrelated to the forthcoming events – Iwaki/Uegaki is not yet a member of the Red Army Faction (RAF) – is depicted from Iwaki/Uegaki's viewpoint, making the reader feeling like sitting at his side (Figure 1). This decentered perspective is further outlined by the first caption of the manga which starts with the words "almost unrelated to that (*sore to wa amari kankei naku*)" (Figure 1), the pronoun "that" referring to another narrative thread introduced a few pages later and depicting rank and file members of the RLF on the verge of breaking into Haneda airport (Figure 2). Through the contrast of both sequences and through the use of eye-level perspective in figure 1 and medium "shot" distance in figure 2, Yamamoto prompts the identification and involvement of the reader with Iwaki/Uegaki and the RLF members, and deconstructs the teleological discourse which sustains the narrative of both *Rain of Light* and *United Red Army*.

Figure 1: Iwaki/Uegaki attending a political meeting at Hirosaki University
(Yamamoto, 2007, p. 5)

Figure 2: lower-rank members of the RLF about to break into Haneda airport
(Yamamoto, 2007, p. 12)

The use of a decentered, depoliticized narrative is a conscious and articulated choice on the part of Yamamoto. In an interview to the film magazine *Kinema Junpô* in 2016, he explained for instance what differentiated his manga from Wakamatsu's movie:

> To be frank, it is too short. In my case, I want to introduce as many events as possible. The period when they were having fun robbing banks and so forth, these are the kind of joyful moments I want to depict before turning to the tragedy of the killings. I also find interesting the case of people who ran away or got caught by the police. (Yamamoto, 2016, p. 50).

At the fortieth anniversary symposium of the incident in 2012, he also proclaimed that he "would rather present things as they are rather than trying to solve the mystery of the incident (*nazo o tokô toka, sô iu yori mo, sono mama teishutsu shitai*)" (Rengô-sekigun jiken no zentaizô o nokosu kai, 2013, p. 286), which is another way to stress his disinterest in the political dimension of the event. The shift of attention from CC to lower-rank members as well as the relative indifference towards the "mystery" of the killings expressed here by the author, though constituting a decisive break with previous representations, are no coincidence and can be considered as the result of a broader change in the social context surrounding the URA's counter-memory.

The "Association to Transmit the Overall Picture of the United Red Army Incident"

Indeed, the years immediately preceding the serialization of *Red* saw a substantial shift in the memorialization of the incident. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the event in 1997 was the occasion of a journey to the mountains of Gunma Prefecture where relatives, supporters, friends and former members gathered and held a memorial service (*irei*) for the victims on the sites of the killings (Rengô-sekigun jiken no zentaizô o nokosu kai, 2013, pp. 31–72). The trip had been arranged by Mukai Chieko, a founding member of the "Association to transmit the overall picture of the United Red Army incident (*rengô-sekigun jiken no zentaizô o nokosu kai*, hereafter called *Nokosu kai*)," an organization founded in January 1987 with two main objectives: giving support to the ongoing appeal hearings of Nagata, Sakaguchi and Uegaki, and to gather as much information as possible about the incident. It is important to stress that *Nokosu kai* was *not* founded by members or former members of the URA: Mukai, a free-lance editor, got to know the organization through the first court hearings, and Mitobe Takashi, another founder and the executive committee representative of the association during a few years, knew some members of the RLF from the time he was a radical student at Yokohama National University, but he did not take part in any activity of the RLF nor, later, of the URA.

As the Japanese verb *nokosu* (to leave, to hand down) implies, *Nokosu kai*'s main concern lies in transmitting to future generations the memory of the incident. Its premise is that something meaningful and worth of remembrance can be learnt from it. The association is also not interested in ideological quarrels or in assessing which member is the most responsible for the killings. Its objective is to transmit the *whole picture* of the URA incident, not to pick up one version over another. *Nokosu kai*'s position is better expressed in the speech Mitobe delivered for the seventeenth commemoration of the incident (*jû nana-kaiki*) held in December 1987:

> it is possible to learn something from the incident, something fruitful, that we may keep alive for future generations. We should record not only comments by people directly involved but also, as a form of primary source related to the overall picture, everything which belongs to the periphery of the incident. This is the reason why we created *Nokosu kai* and are taking part in its activities. (Rengô-sekigun jiken no zentaizô o nokosu kai, 2013, p. 27)

The Second Wave of Counter-Memory

Though founded in 1987, *Nokosu kai*'s objectives to gather, record and publish testimonies of the incident took time to realize, and until 2003 the association remained barely visible to the general public. The decisive impetus came from the release from jail of former members who were to cooperate actively with *Nokosu kai* and publish their own accounts of the murders.

Contrary to still living CC members, sentenced to death or life imprisonment – and of Bandô, who had been released from jail in 1975 in an extralegal deal with the Japanese Red Army – lower-rank members such as Uegaki had all, by 2000, been released. Katô Michinori (1952–), whose brother Yoshitaka (1949–1972) died on January 4, as well as Maesawa Torayoshi (1947–), who escaped during the transfer from Haruna mountain camp to Kashô mountain camp at the end of January, had both been released in 1987, and Aoto Mikio (1949–) and Uegaki Yasuhiro, both arrested on February 19 – a few hours before the shootout at the Asama Lodge – and sentenced respectively to 23 and 27 years of imprisonment, had been released in 1994 and 1998. Back into society, these former militants were free to share their experience in the URA and started disseminating their own narrative of the incident. A second commemorative excursion held in 2003 for the thirtieth anniversary of the incident saw the participation of Uegaki, whose help to locate the former sites of Haruna and Kashô mountain camps – the

places where the majority of the killings occurred – was decisive. Uegaki, Katô, and Maesawa also took part in the memorial for the victims of the URA held in Tôkyô that same year. For the first time, former members gathered to discuss publicly and share their experience of the *sôkatsu* killings, an event which triggered the publication of the first testimonies by *Nokosu kai*. Indeed, the association has since been involved in the publishing of a series of "*shôgen* (testimonies)" in the form of booklets where former members discuss their own perspectives of the incident. Between 2004 and 2019 twelve issues of the *shôgen* series have been published[11]. Concurrently to these engagements with *Nokosu kai*, Uegaki, Katô, Maesawa and Aoto were also involved in interviews for magazines, television companies, newspapers, as well as in the publication of their own record of the incident. Uegaki was the most active of the group with the publishing of *United Red Army: Testimony of the Twenty-Seventh Year* (Uegaki, 2001a) and of a renewed edition of his former *The Soldiers of the United Red Army* (Uegaki, 2001b), and with participations in television and public talks. Katô published his own book in 2003 (Katô, 2003), and Maesawa and Aoto were also busy giving interviews in magazines and newspapers at the same period.

These testimonies represent a shift in the way people relate to the killings. Whereas Sakaguchi, Nagata and Bandô's accounts tend to stress the *specificity* of the incident and focus on the ideological and theoretical framework used to justify the murders, *Nokosu kai*, on the other hand, insists on its *unspecificity* and highlights group dynamics or marxism as the main cause. As a consequence, the responsibility for the murders remains unclear, and the general impression is that rank and file members were overwhelmed by political forces beyond their control. As suggested by Fabiana Cecchini in her study of the autobiographical account *Il Prigioniero* by former Red Brigade member Anna Laura Braghetti, the sense of inevitability and victimhood radiating from these accounts has for major consequence to dissociate the witness from his/her terrorist and political past. In Cecchini's (2011) words:

> the […] identity that emerges places direct reliance on the reader to listen to and understand her rather than judge her life choices. The reader, in this case, is understood to be a member of the community "that is willing to forgive a prodigal child" […]. The community is one to which Braghetti wishes to return, in hopes of recovering her reputation and returning to modern society with a new identity. (p. 86)

It is important to note that, similar to Braghetti's account, former rank and file members' accounts do not ask the audience to judge their past political actions or mistakes, but instead to *understand* them. This is the reason why their approach seems more descriptive than narrative and why they give so much attention to details which would be considered insignificant in the context of the first wave of counter-memory. Besides, after long-term prison sentences, Uegaki, Katô, Maesawa and Aoto were also eager to start a new life and, for some of them, marry and have children (Asayama, 2012). Adopting a more consensual stance and projecting themselves as victims rather than perpetrators was an efficient way to recover their reputation and seek forgiveness.

Red and the Second Wave of Counter-Memory
When asked in 2016 which former members had been interviewed for the preparation of *Red*, Yamamoto mentioned "Uegaki (Yasuhiro), Aoto (Mikio), Maesawa (Torayoshi), Yukino

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[11] A shortened version of the issues published before 2012 has been gathered and reedited in Rengô-sekigun jiken no zentaizô o nokosu kai, 2013.

(Kensaku), and the second son of the Katô siblings (Michinori)" (Yamamoto, 2016, p. 50). They are all members of *Nokosu kai* or people involved in its activities (Yukino, arrested in the summer of 1971 and which for that reason did not take part in the *sôkatsu* killings, became after 1997 one of the most active members of the association). It must also be noted that, as part of a project called "Let's Go Explore With Yamamoto Naoki (*Yamamoto Naoki no sagurinagara itte miyô*)" for the magazine *Tsukuru*, Yamamaoto had already interviewed Uegaki and Katô as of 2004 and 2005, that is, more than one year before *Red*'s serialization began (Yamamoto, 2018b, pp. 113–124). The manga is thus obviously indebted to the second wave of counter-memory, and its memory politics can be considered as basically the same as *Nokosu kai*. This proximity helps explain the break *Red* represents when compared to previous visual representations of the URA incident. It also explains the historical accuracy of the manga, Yamamoto having been granted access to information never related publicly by members of the association. Scenes such as the one depicting Iwaki/Uegaki being possibly recognized by a child (Yamamoto, 2009, pp. 83–85), or showing Iwaki/Uegaki and Kita/Mori living temporarily in the luxurious apartment of a famous celebrity in Tôkyô (Yamamoto, 2011, p. 97), have for instance all been directly related to the author by Uegaki and contribute to enhance the documentary value of the manga.

However, *Nokosu kai*'s memory politics cannot be considered as more neutral or better reflecting the truth than the more one-sided first wave of counter-memory. As mentioned above, the association does possess a particular perspective on the incident, and *Red*, though reflecting faithfully the association's memory politics, twists and simplifies decisively some aspects to give it a more universal and appealing turn.

Red, or the Rehabilitation of the URA's Memory

Espousing the View of Lower-Rank Members

As mentioned in the first part, Yamamoto's work departs from previous representations in that it also focuses on daily, insignificant activities and does not center its narrative on the murders. Scenes depicting RLF members playing golf (Yamamoto, 2007, pp. 78–79), RAF members having sex (Yamamoto, 2008, pp. 52–54), or URA members joyfully playing arm wrestling (Yamamoto, 2012, pp. 36–39) are not unusual and tend to depict the organization in a rather sympathetic light. However, the visual composition of these scenes is as much important as their content, and it is through the use of skillfully drawn panels espousing the point-of-view of the lower-rank members that the reader's identification with the organization becomes really effective.

For instance, in the short scene mentioned above of Iwaki/Uegaki being possibly recognized by a child, Yamamoto relies on a complex structure of points-of-views to transform a minor incident into a moving sequence. The episode takes place the day after a major political and military failure on the part of the RAF, and starts with a depressed Iwaki/Uegaki being told on the phone that his girlfriend had an abortion. After the phone call, the character notices a child staring at him from the lower left side of the frame (Figure 3). He stares back and, on the next page, we see the child looking in the opposite direction (lower left side of the frame). The following panel reveals the object of the kid's gaze: wanted posters of RLF and RAF members with Iwaki/Uegaki's face prominently displayed on them (Figure 4). The sense of urgency and suspense is enhanced through the next panel, a tight close up of Iwaki/Uegaki's eyes, and then an exchange of looks with the child from the terrorist's point-of-view. The reader expects some action to happen: the child starting to scream, or Iwaki/Uegaki starting to run away. However, the exact opposite happens. Indeed, the next panel shows the terrorist lingering: he vaguely

smiles, waves at the child, and then leaves calmly (Figure 5). This wordless interaction does not only highlight the character's humanity – instead of running away or using violence to escape, he *smiles* – but also highlights in a very subtle manner his feelings of sadness and uncertainty. Through the complex use of point-of-view frames, Yamamoto thus transforms a minor episode into a moving scene through which the reader cannot but feel sympathy for Iwaki/Uegaki.

Figure 3: Iwaki/Uegaki hangs up the phone and notices a child staring at him
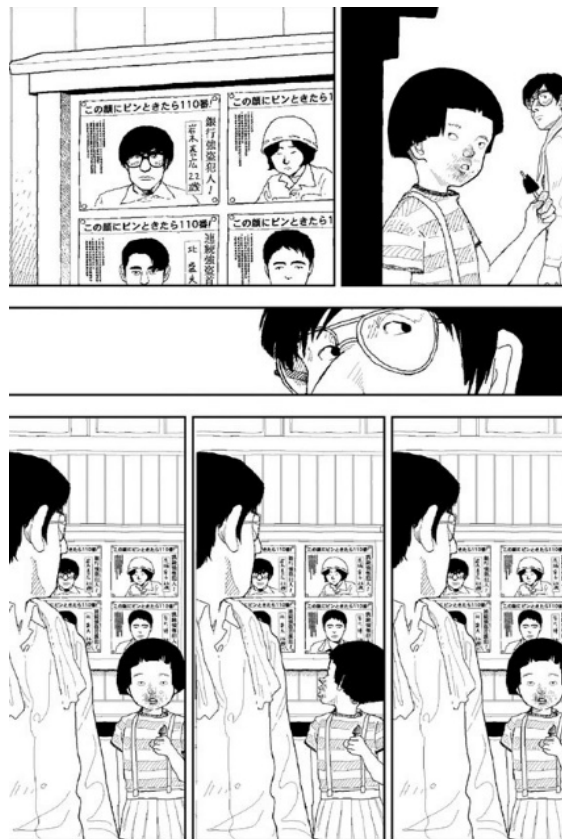(Yamamoto, 2009, p. 83)

Figure 4: Iwaki/Uegaki's face displayed on the wanted posters (Yamamoto, 2009, p.84)

Figure 5: Iwaki/Uegaki stares back, smiles and waves at the child before leaving
(Yamamoto, 2009, p. 85)

Point-of-views framed from the perspective of lower-rank members are also extensively used in the more problematic setting of the killings. In Haruna mountain camp – the place where most of the murders took place – CC members had a separate room to debate and discuss the URA's political agenda. However, important decisions were notified to the whole group through *zentai kaigi* or general meetings, and it is through those meetings that the first deaths were reported and justified on political grounds to all members. Yamamoto deals with these important and crucial moments through the use of long shot distance and eye-level perspective, prompting the reader to identify with lower-rank members. For instance, in the scene depicting the announcement of the first death[12], the author uses a long shot making leaders Akagi/Nagata and Kita/Mori appear as tiny little figures in the background (Figure 6). The "distance effect" is further enhanced through the use of a big table in the middle drawn with one-point perspective, and of a speech balloon (*Ibuki ga shinimashita*, "Ibuki is dead") whose size is remarkably small compared to the panel. Needless to say, eye-line perspective – as in the case of figure 1 – contributes to involve the reader and gives him/her the impression of sitting among rank and file members. The identification with the latter ones is further reinforced by the use of a series of reaction "shots" in the lower half of the page: framed in medium close up, mouth closed and eyes looking to the side, the characters are presented with rather dubious expressions.

Figure 6: Akagi/Nagata announcing the death of the first *sôkatsu* victim
(Yamamoto, 2015a, p. 9)

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[12] It is the death of Ibuki, or Ozaki Mitsuo (1950–1971) in real life.

Figure 7: Akagi/Nagata justifying Ibuki/Ozaki's death as "death by defeatism"
(Yamamoto, 2015a, p. 11)

The reader is clearly asked to sympathize with lower-rank members and to put into question Akagi/Nagata and Kita/Mori's words. Indeed, in the next double page spread, the female leader introduces and links for the first time the concepts of "communization of the self" and "death by defeatism", arguing that Ibuki/Ozaki's death is not the result of physical violence but of his own failure to achieve communization (Figure 7). If Akagi/Nagata looks rather confident, this is not the case of lower-rank members whose disbelief is even more apparent than on the preceding page. Some of them don't even look at the leader, and their facial expression and thoughts – the fourth panel suggests they are thinking of Kurobe (Katô Yoshitaka in real life) and Yakushi (Kojima Kazuko [1949–1972] in real life), both subjected to *sôkatsu* and tied to trees outside – clearly mark them as doubtful of Akagi/Nagata's message. Through the skillful use of point-of-view and reaction shots, Yamamoto thus undermines the ideological and theoretical framework used by the leaders to justify the murders, inviting the reader to take his/her distance with the political atmosphere at the time of the killings. As outlined in the first part, this approach is consistent with *Nokosu kai*'s memory politics of considering the URA incident as the consequence of group dynamics rather than politics. However, the use of point-of-view frames and other visual devices aimed at triggering the identification of the reader also constitutes a break from the association's objective to seek understanding rather than judgement.

Powerless Victims
As is evident from the lower two panels of figure 7, point-of-views in *Red* do not just serve the purpose of undermining the ideological framework or inviting the reader to identify with lower-rank members: they also tend to reinforce the sense of weakness and failure which pervades the narrative, contributing to transform potential terrorists and ideologues into helpless and powerless victims. In figure 8, for instance, we see Miyaura – Kaneko Michiyo (1948–1972) in real life – about to be beaten with a rope by Kita/Mori. The low-angle perspective enhances the weakness of the young woman – who is also eight months pregnant – and presents Kita/Mori as a ruthless and omnipotent torturer. As a consequence, the reader is not asked to understand or reflect on the situation but to engage emotionally with the young woman and to consider Kita/Mori as the villain of the piece. This is a blatant simplification of the situation at the time of the killings.

Figure 8: Miyaura/Kaneko facing Kita/Mori before being tortured (Yamamoto, 2017, p. 11)

Indeed, it must be noted that, while leaders Mori and Nagata did provide the theoretical framework to justify the murders, it is rank and file members – including Kaneko Michiyo – who participated the most in the beating and the burying of the victims. As such, they obviously bear a responsibility and cannot be depicted as helpless and innocent victims without rising serious moral concerns. If *Nokosu kai*'s memory politics of considering the URA incident as the consequence of group dynamics rather than ideology is also pervaded by a sense of victimhood, the distinction between victims and perpetrators remains unclear – for instance, Mori and Nagata are frequently mourned as victims of the incident rather than perpetrators (Rengô-sekigun jiken no zentaizô o nokosu kai, 2013, p. 169) – and the reader is not asked to actively identify with the victims and consider the sole URA leadership as responsible. By contrast, point-of-views in Yamamoto's work espouse wholeheartedly the position of helpless and powerless victims, urging the audience to take side and to dissociate between good and evil, "innocent" victims and perpetrators.

Another efficient mean through which the distinction between perpetrators and victims is achieved in *Red* is the use of extradiegetic numbers informing in advance the reader of the death of the protagonists. Located on the "outside" of the diegesis – the characters cannot see them – these numbers appear as ominous signs and contribute to the manga's overall sense of inevitability and victimhood. For instance, Shirane (Ôtsuki Setsuko [1948–1972] in real life), the thirteenth character to perish in *Red*, systematically appears with the number 13 painted on her, Miyaura/Kaneko, the fourteenth to die, the number 14 (see Figure 8), and so forth. Yamamoto has stated in interviews that the device was inspired by Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Galápagos* (1985) and theatre director Matsuo Suzuki's play *Countdown* (1995), and was aimed primarily at facilitating the identification of the different characters (Yamamoto & Kirino 2008, p. 175). The device does facilitate the reading of the story, but also reinforces the impression that Miyaura/Kaneko and others were from the beginning passive victims instead of active agents of the situation. For instance, after the shock of Ibuki/Ozaki's death mentioned above, the members gather and are urged by Akagi/Nagata and Kita/Mori to continue to act as usual and to "work hard on Ibuki/Ozaki's behalf" (*Ibuki no bun made ganbatte ikanakereba naranai*). Number 8 (Amagi/Tôyama) and number 13 (Ôtsuki/Shirane) then start a political speech through which both women assert their political commitment (Figure 9). Amagi/Tôyama says she came to the mountain to become a "soldier of the Revolution" (*kakumei-senshi*), and Ôtsuki/Shirane, after a lengthy quote of Mao Zedong, expresses how Ibuki/Ozaki's death must be considered as insignificant and detestable (*daki subeki karui mono*

da). It is a bold declaration expressing the view of people fully committed to the Revolution and ready to die for it. However, the sheer presence of the numbers suggests to the reader that the women do not really believe in them and are just begging for the attention of the leaders. Even though they express strongly their political will, they still appear as the passive victims of a situation they do not control. This doomed sense of inevitability is further enhanced by Kita/Mori's intervention in the next panel, complaining to Amagi/Tôyama, Takachiho (Shindô Ryûzaburô [1950–1972] in real life) and Bandai (Namekata Masatoki [1949–1972] in real life), that they are not taking seriously enough their own *sôkatsu*. Significantly, Kita/Mori, who committed suicide on January 31, 1973, and who is frequently remembered as a victim of the incident by *Nokosu kai*, does not appear with a number (unlike, for instance, the civilian and the two policemen killed during the Asama Lodge shootout, appearing respectively with the numbers 16, 17, and 18 in the last volume).

Figure 9: Number 8 (Amagi/Tôyama) and number 13 (Ôtsuki/Shirane) asserting their political commitment in front of Kita/Mori (Yamamoto, 2015a, p. 13)

Names also play an important role in dissociating the victims from the perpetrators. As with *Rain of Light* – both novel and film – *Red* does not rely on real names but uses instead fictionalized versions of them. Yamamoto and his editor were apparently considering the legal risks when they took this decision (Yamamoto, Kirino, Kanai, 2018, p. 66) but, as other changes added by the manga, these transformations were carried out on dramatic rather than historical premises. Leaders Nagata Hiroko and Mori Tsuneo are for instance transformed into Akagi Hiroko and Kita Morio. The kanji for Akagi (赤城) literally means "red castle" and the one for Kita (北), "north". They both connote elevation and communism. "Kita", the opposite of "south", possibly refers to North Korea, the kanji being regularly used in newspapers to refer to the country; it must also be noted that the RAF – the group to which Kita/Mori originally belonged to – also successfully hijacked a plane, the Yodogô, to North Korea in March 1970. By contrast, *sôkatsu* victims all possess names connoting purity and sacredness. Tôyama, Akagi/Nagata's alter-ego, becomes for instance Amagi (天城) or "heaven castle", Ôtsuki becomes Shirane (白根) or "white root", Kaneko becomes Miyaura (宮浦) or "inlet shrine", Yamazaki Jun (1950–1972) becomes Kamiyama (神山) or "mountain of the god", and so on. The sense of victimhood is thus not only inscribed in the visual composition of the panels, but also in the names of the characters.

Removing the Political and Historical Context

As with the characters' names, the title of the manga can also be considered a decisive form of generalization and, by extension, of depoliticization. Indeed, the word "red" (*reddo*) was not in use at the time of the event to refer neither to communism nor to New Left politics (the ideological current to which the URA belongs). Its choice may stem from commercial reasons – it sounds better to a contemporary audience than the words "communism", "New Left", or *aka(i)* (red), much more radical and negatively connoted – but it also has the consequence of presenting the URA and its ideological background as something intrinsically alien. Indeed, in Japanese the word is written in *katakana* (レッド), a syllabary usually reserved for non-Japanese names, thus suggesting that the URA and New Left politics in general can be considered a foreign import. This approach is consistent with Yamamoto's overall strategy to dismiss the post-1968 political atmosphere as the underlying cause of the murders, and to focus instead on group dynamics. It also implies that all left-wing politics, from the *Zenkyôtô* student movement to more traditional parties like the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), are one and the same[13]. Indeed, the difference between the New Left and the Old Left (which includes the JCP) is nowhere addressed in the manga, and words like New Left or New Left movements are systematically replaced by "revolution" (*kakumei*) or "class struggle" (*kaikyû-tôsô*), that is, expressions which can refer to both currents. The generalization of the political context hinders a proper understanding of the URA and of the *sôkatsu* murders.

Indeed, the two organizations at the origin of the URA – the RAF and the RLF – both lay roots in different and opposed ideological currents. On the hand, the RAF – as its full name, Red Army Faction of the Communist League, indicates – is the offspring of the Communist League or *Bund*, a New Left organization founded in 1958 which played a central role in the protest against the signature of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States in 1960. The *Bund*, as other New Left organizations, not only stems from the opposition to Stalinism – the latter having been publicly denounced at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 – but also, and more significantly, from the opposition to the concept of "Democratic Revolution for National Independence" (*minzoku dokuritsu minshushugi kakumei*) which was being brought to the fore by the JCP at the time (Tôshi hensan iinkai, 1977, pp. 72–74). For students and intellectuals informed by Trotskyism and internationalism, the concept of "National Revolution" not only meant the betrayal of the idea of World Revolution, but also embracing Japanese imperialism. Officially founded in September 1969, the RAF has inherited *Bund* and New Left's internationalism. It is for instance at the origin of the Japanese Red Army's foundation in 1971 – a terrorist organization based in Lebanon and involved in attacks all around the world – and of the Yodogô highjack incident mentioned above. Its targets were also primarily government facilities like the Ministry of Defense or the Prime Minister's office. The RLF, on the other hand, and as its full name of Revolutionary Left Faction of the Japanese Communist Party indicates, is affiliated to Old Left politics. Though unrelated to the JCP at the moment of its foundation in April 1969, the group still shared the anti-Americanism of its parent organization. Its political line was for instance "patriotic and anti-American" (*hanbei aikoku rosen*), and the majority of its targets between 1969 and 1970 were U.S. related facilities (bases in Kanagawa Prefecture and the consulate in Yokohama). Smaller, the RLF attracted more students from working-class backgrounds and had a strong feminist position. By comparison, the RAF was composed mainly of middle-class students from good universities and was much more male-oriented (Steinhoff, 1992, p. 196). When both organizations merged in July 1971 to form the URA, differences between New Left

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[13] The *Zenkyôtô* or All-campus Joint Struggle Councils is the organization form which was at the center of the 1968 student protest.

and Old Left politics soon crystallized into quarrels and dissensions which eventually led to the first *sôkatsu*. In the self-criticism statement (*jiko-hihan sho*) Mori wrote right after his arrest in February 1972, the URA leader indicates that when both groups joined in Haruna base camp at the end of December 1971, a "critical examination of the history" (*rekishi-teki sôkatsu*) of the RLF and the RAF was undertaken (Mori, 1984, p. 16). Physical violence as a way to help Katô Yoshitaka achieve his *sôkatsu* – though not the first to die, Katô was the first member subjected to torture – was introduced right after this critical examination. It can also be argued that concepts like "communization of the self", though borrowing to New Left phraseology, were made up from the bottom by Mori to deal with the questioning by the RLF of Tôyama's commitment to women's liberation (Tôyama's hairstyle, clothes and makeup were considered a problem by RLF members). The theoretical framework which will lay the foundation to justify the murders can thus be considered, at least in the beginning, as the answer found by Mori and Nagata to adjust the ideological differences existing between both organizations. Erasing the opposition between New Left and Old Left is thus a decisive move on Yamamoto's part, a move which not only contributes to hinder our understanding of the incident but also changes completely its historical significance.

Conclusion

As one of the first examples of a mediation of the second wave of counter-memory, *Red* has decisively contributed to the rehabilitation of the URA incident in contemporary Japanese society. The popular television program *Walking through modern history* (*Ikegami Akira no gendai-shi o aruku*) (Tôkyô Television) has for instance explicitly espoused the perspective of lower-rank members and reenacted, for the first time on television, Uegaki and Aoto's arrest on the occasion of a special program broadcast on January 27, 2019. The novels *Army of the Dead* (*Shisha no guntai*) by Kanai Hiroaki (1948–) and *Going through the Valley of the Night* (*Yoru no tani o yuku*) by popular writer Kirino Natsuo (1951–) were also published respectively in 2015 and 2017, the former dealing with the incident from the perspective of leader Nagata Hiroko and the latter espousing the view of a female rank and file member. *Red*'s popular success has also contributed to increase *Nokosu kai*'s visibility, and as such can be considered a decisive factor in the steady publication of the "*shogen*" series by the association since 2004. The proximity between the association and Yamamoto also explains the historical accuracy of the manga and its documentary value. *Red*'s overall contribution to a more contrasted and exhaustive understanding of the URA incident is thus undeniable. However, as suggested in the course of this article, the way Yamamoto reworks *Nokosu kai*'s memory politics on more universal and sanitized grounds is not without raising serious moral and political concerns.

Though firmly grounded in first-hand accounts and possessing an undeniable documentary value, *Red* may indeed be better understood not as a historical account – or, to use Yamamoto's word, a "non-fiction" (Yamamoto, 2018a, p. 25) – of the URA incident, but as a failure narrative of New Left politics. Significantly, the manga opens with the symbol of student activism defeat in Japan – the "fall" of the Yasuda Auditorium at Tôkyô University on January 19, 1969 – and ends with Tanigawa – Sakaguchi Hiroshi in real life – being violently dragged out of Asama Lodge by police forces. Both images borrow to the period's iconography – the Yasuda Auditorium's scene is directly inspired by a famous aerial photograph by Tôkyô Shimbun, and the URA sequence comes from the equally famous NHK live footage of the Asama Lodge incident – and both express a sense of failure and powerlessness (the students of the first image appear as tiny white helmets and Taniguchi/Sakaguchi looks like a vulnerable prey in the second). As detailed in the first part, *Red* departs from previous fictional accounts in that its interest lies primarily with insignificant and "joyful moments" than with the killings *per se*. It

is significant, then, that Yamamoto did not make the choice of the most "joyful" moment of the period – that is, 1968 – as the beginning of his story, but chose instead its symbolic failure. Framing the URA incident through the categories of defeat and victimhood has deep moral and political consequences. It urges the readers to identify with what appear as hapless and weak victims rather than violent revolutionaries, obscuring the fact that *everyone* bears a moral responsibility in the killings. It also denies the group any form of political agency and contributes to enforce the conservative idea that the URA members were not intrinsically radicals, but confused young people overwhelmed by the historical and political situation of the time. That the Japanese government has enthusiastically endorsed *Red* thus comes as no surprise, and the rehabilitation of the URA's memory through failure and victimhood, though decisive to foster a better understanding of the incident, raises the difficult question of the possibility of a truly radical left-wing politics in contemporary Japan.

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