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Arceo, Verenize

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Undergraduate

**THE
UNDERGRADUATE
HISTORICAL
JOURNAL**

At UC Merced

Volume 4 • Number 1 • 2018

**The Undergraduate Historical Journal
At the University of California, Merced**

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All correspondence should be directed to the editorial board.

Email: ucmercedhistoricaljournal@gmail.com

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Letter from the Chief Editor

I am proud to present the first issue of the fourth volume of *The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced*. This issue is the result of months of tireless efforts from both my editorial board and the students who embarked on the process of becoming published authors.

Third-year history major, T.R. Salsman offers readers an analysis on Persian Kingship and the impact that it had on power in a Post-Abbasid Persian. Fourth-year history major, Alex Wood researched the practices of Old-World America and the effects these practices had in forming the divides we still see in American society today. Fourth-year history major, Adriano Dore Gomes Da Costa analyzed the implications Merced's urban space has on the image formation of taco shops in the area.

These articles demonstrate the hard-earned effort historians pursue when tasked with making their work publishable. This issue offers readers a wide variety of topics that demonstrates the complexity and flexibility of the history discipline, especially at UC Merced. Salsman's paper moves beyond the habit of comparing two sources as different because they were produced by different individuals; rather, it demonstrates the contingent character of historical development. Wood's paper reflects historical efforts in continuing to ask questions and redefine our understanding of the past. Gomes Da Costa's paper challenges our understanding of what constitutes as evidence and pushes readers to move beyond traditional textual sources to analyze our surrounding communities. Together, these articles represent the core concepts of the history community at UC Merced.

I am very proud of this issue and I invite all audiences to partake in the grand efforts that this journal reflects. I would like to take this time to personally thank those whose efforts made the completion of this issue of the *Undergraduate Historical Journal* possible. This project would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of my editorial board: Pooja Dimba, Adriano Dore Gomes Da Costa, Israel Pacheco, and Akhila Yechuri. I would like to thank Associate Professor Sholeh Quinn, whose insight and encouragement we are especially thankful for; this project reflects the unique bond students and faculty of history build at UC Merced in working to produce written works in history. Last and certainly not least, I would like to thank the original Chief Editor, Rocco Bowman. Rocco, who is currently a Graduate Student in UC Merced's Interdisciplinary Humanities Program, has been a constant helping hand in this process.

Verenize Arceo
Chief Editor

Faculty Forward

It is a great honor and privilege for me to write a faculty forward to this issue of *The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced*. This journal is now in its fifth year of operation, and regularly publishing one to two issues per year! I would like to stress that this journal was established and is run entirely by UC Merced undergraduate students. They solicit the articles, they work with the authors until a submission is ready for publication, and they edit the individual pieces. The feedback that they offer is constructive and supportive at the same time—which is any author’s dream!

While it is now commonplace for graduate students to publish their scholarship, relatively fewer opportunities exist for undergraduate history students to have the first-hand experience of seeing a piece of scholarship through to publication. Doing so allows them to put into practice the historiographical skills they learn in their classes and share their work with an audience beyond their classmates. That UC Merced undergraduates have created this opportunity for their fellow students will come as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with the remarkable student body of this young university.

Verenize Arceo, the Chief Editor of *The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced*, along with members of the editorial team-- Pooja Dimba, Adriano Dore Gomes Da Costa, Israel Pacheco, and Akhila Yechuri—have all worked extremely hard not only to publish this issue, but also to re-establish the journal after a period of turnover due to most of the previous editorial team having graduated. Every member of the editorial team was new to the job and spent a great deal of time familiarizing themselves with the process of publishing a journal. The result is the issue here.

The three interesting articles in this issue cover a wide range of topics and time periods, including kingship in medieval Persia, old world perceptions in colonial North America, and taco shops in contemporary Merced, California. They reflect one of the guiding principles of the humanities here at UC Merced: “the world at home and at home in the world.”

Sholeh Quinn
Associate Professor of History

ARTICLES

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The Individual and Ideal: Preserving the King and Persian Kingship

By T.R. Salsman

Introduction

The Middle East has a long history of cultivating power; since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, many individuals have sought to successfully garner a large following to extend their influence in the region. These individuals were referred to as caliphs, or successors to the Prophet. Caliphal rule spanned two dynasties: first from the 7th to 8th century with the Umayyad Caliphate having control, followed by the Abbasid Caliphate. In the mid-9th century, the Abbasid Caliphate began to crumble and by the mid-10th century, they lost complete secular authority; one of the earliest and most vehement defectors to Abbasid power, and a political context ripe for shaping new forms of legitimacy, was Iran.¹

In the late 11th century, Kay Kāvus, king of the short-lived Western Persian dynasty called the Ziyarids, sought to preserve his legacy. In doing so, he wrote a book of advice, called *The Qābusnāmeḥ* (*The Book of Kāvus*). This work was created for his favorite son and later successor, Gilānshāh. *The Qābusnāmeḥ* contains practical advice on how nobles and rulers should comport themselves, as well as short stories to illustrate Kay Kāvus's points and create a legacy for himself. The Samanid dynasty of the late 10th century, had somewhat larger ambitions than the Ziyarids. Located in Eastern Persia, the Samanids, attempted to legitimize themselves as the worthy successors to the great ancient Persian civilizations of the Sassanids and Achaemenids.² To this end, they commissioned the poet Abolqasem Ferdowsi to compose an epic poem about the mythical, legendary, and historical pre-Islamic kings of Iran. The poem, known as *The Shāhnāmeḥ* (*The Book of Kings*), was intended to glorify the ideals of Persian kingship.

Although Islamic conquerors had succeeded in taking political control of the region, Persian culture had remained resilient; the moment Arabic hegemony began to wane, Persian kingship reemerged. Several dynasties established themselves as independent of caliphal political authority (though the caliph still claimed religious authority over the Ummā).³ However, these fledgling dynasties were tenuous. As a result, they required effective governance and new sources of legitimacy. The purpose of this paper is to examine two different approaches of legitimacy and kingship, as they arose at the intersection of local and post-Abbasid political contexts

Approaches to Legitimacy

Both *The Qābusnāmeḥ* and *The Shāhnāmeḥ* were intended to preserve a legacy. However, the nature of that legacy differs. In the case of *The Qābusnāmeḥ*, the immediate intention was to make sure that Gilānshāh would continue the line of the Ziyarids; this would ensure that Kay Kāvus's legacy continued directly as he intended. In the case of Ferdowsi, the intention was to

¹ Throughout this paper I will be referring to the physical space of greater Iran (including land that is currently not part of Iran) as Iran, however, I will be referring to the culture of the region as Persian culture, deriving the term from the language.

² The Sassanids ruled Iran from the 3rd to the 7th Centuries CE and the Achaemenids ruled from the 4th and the 6th Centuries BCE.

³ The community of all the world's Muslims.

legitimize the reign of the Samanids. In preserving the legacy of the dynasty as a whole, Ferdowsi wanted the Samanids to be viewed in the same light as the great dynasties before them. Depending on who is controlling the story, one could argue that Persian kingship was centered around the strength of the ruler or dependent on the strength of the entire empire; it is this distinction that demonstrates the power that stems from the works at this time.

The Qābusnāmeḥ contains a wealth of practical advice for those that proceed Kay Kāvus are expected to follow. This is because the success of Kay Kāvus's legacy is dependent on the fact that his methods for reign must outlive him. He directly informs his successors that a king needs to be ready to find a way to get out of any predicament. For instance, in the chapter on lying and truth telling, Kay Kāvus advises his son to, "become known for veracity, so that if ever in an emergency you utter a lie it will be believed."⁴ This advice makes it clear that Kay Kāvus does not intend *The Qābusnāmeḥ* to be a guide of morality, but rather as a practical guide to surviving and maintaining power. Kay Kāvus demonstrates that a king must place the needs of the king before anything else; rather than focusing on being morally conscience of those being ruled over, the king must exercise any avenue to maintain control.

On the other hand, Ferdowsi emphasizes morality over practicality. In one of *The Shāhnāmeḥ*'s mythic stories, Iraj, the king of Iran, goes to negotiate with his brothers Salm and Tur, who are jealous of his prosperous kingdom. Faridun, their father, advises him to go armed, but Iraj refuses and is murdered. Ultimately, his grandson Manuchehr avenges him by killing Salm and Tur. At the end of this story, Ferdowsi includes a short moral, "O world from end to end unreal, untrue/ No wise man can live happily in you—/ But bless'd is he whose good deeds bring him fame;/ Monarch or slave, he leaves a lasting name."⁵ The wise man refers to Faridun and it implies that Iraj is among those whose honorable deeds brought them fame. Iraj represents an ideal of benevolent kingship. Ferdowsi points to the notion that kings should be just and move beyond the habit of prioritizing themselves over what is morally right.

When analyzing how *The Qābusnāmeḥ* and *The Shāhnāmeḥ* approach legitimacy, it becomes clear to see that both emphasized different approaches. Kay Kāvus was concerned with having rulers exploit any means to get around those being ruled over. Abolqasem Ferdowsi called for rulers to exploit proper and just means; this was emphasized in order to ensure the longevity of the dynasty, rather than the individual at the head of the dynasty. These differences demonstrate that at a time when the future of a dynasty was uncertain, those in power had different takes on the type of approaches future rulers should follow in order to ensure the livelihood of their respective dynasty.

Writing for an Audience

The differing audiences for these two sources explains why *The Qābusnāmeḥ* and *The Shāhnāmeḥ* approach kingship by separate means. *The Qābusnāmeḥ* was not intended to be viewed by the public, but rather for the elite class. This explains why it takes a more direct and pragmatic approach. *The Shāhnāmeḥ* was expected to reach the public and influence public perception pertaining the Samanid dynasty. Because of this, it takes an approach that is more readily propagated orally. Keeping the intended audience in mind allows for a deeper analysis on the nature of why each source was written in the manner it was produced. Both Kay Kāvus and

⁴ Kai Kā'us, *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama*, Trans. Reuben Levy, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1951), 35.

⁵ Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, Trans. Dick Davis, (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 62.

Ferdowsi were trying to control their expected reader's perception of the king or dynasty; ultimately, influencing how either would be remembered.

Kay Kāvus emphasized several times that appearances were more important than actual ethical behavior. For example, the Muslim Ziyarids should have been opposed to drinking on principle. However, Kay Kāvus resigned himself to the fact that Gilānshāh would drink regardless of his advice, and instead advises his son, “never drink wine in the open or in an orchard; but if you do then return within doors before reaching intoxication... for what is proper within your own dwelling is intolerable under the open sky.”⁶ He urged his son to maintain the appearance of following the doctrinal ban on wine drinking, but not to actually obey the rule in practice. Since it is unwise to inform the public that they are being deceived by those in power, we can infer that this advice was not intended for public consumption. Kay Kāvus is free to be pragmatic because he is writing for nobles, not the public. Doing this allows Kay Kāvus to preserve his son's reign by explaining how one in power can break the rules if done discreetly. The candid advice given is not meant to please the public, but rather instruct successors of practices that will please the public. Kay Kāvus is concerned with future rulers maintaining the appearance of morality, rather than instructing these rulers to live by a foundation of grounded morals.

Ferdowsi was writing with the intention to have his work spread to a public audience. *The Shāhnāme* was part of a rich oral tradition and was originally commissioned as Samanid propaganda. This would indicate that an image of the Samanid dynasty was on display for the world to see. However, *The Shāhnāme*'s relationship with its audience is more complicated than simple propaganda, because the Samanids lost power before it was finished and were replaced by the Ghaznavids, who were Turks. Throughout the poem, Ferdowsi insults the Turks. They are portrayed as cruel, treacherous, violent, and unjust. For instance, in the heroic tale of Bizhan and Manizheh, when the young Persian Bizhan is discovered in the chambers of the Turkish Manizheh, the Turks promise that he will not be harmed if he surrenders and lets himself be bound. However, when he is brought before the king, Bizhan is not given a chance to prove his worth.⁷ To add insult to injury, Rostam, one of the greatest heroes of *The Shāhnāme* must come and rescue Bizhan⁸ and together they defeat Afrasyab, who eventually flees.⁹ Because the Ghaznavids were Turks, Ferdowsi's criticism seems quite peculiar. There are several possible interpretations that could explain why these anti-Turk messages were not omitted; Ferdowsi is arguing that legitimate Persian kingship must be ethnically or culturally Persian because unlike the Turks, Persian culture is presented as an ideal that should be emulated. Ferdowsi encourages the Ghaznavids to assimilate to the Persian tradition, rather than rule as culturally Turkic outsiders.

The authors of *The Qābusnāme* and *The Shāhnāme* were both concerned with how their respective audiences would receive their work. In *The Qābusnāme*, Kay Kāvus is speaking directly to those that will succeed his reign. He is very direct and offers future rulers with information that will allow them to get away with deceiving and appeasing the public at the same time; Kay Kāvus wants to preserve the power of the king. In *The Shāhnāme*, Abolqasem Ferdowsi is concerned with selling the image of the Samanid dynasty. Because his work was designed for public consumption, Ferdowsi writes in a manner to associate the Samanid dynasty with morality and control; this allows *The Shāhnāme* to be used to popularize the best elements of the Samanid dynasty. The differences in audiences demonstrates that both authors were concerned with how

⁶ Kā'us, *The Qabus Nama*, 59.

⁷ Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, 341-342.

⁸ Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, 364.

⁹ Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, 369.

their respective dynasties would be ruled and remembered. Deciding to write in a direct or propagated manner, allows the authors to control how their history would be remembered.

Conclusion

Having witnessed other dynasties' fall from grace, Kay Kāvus and Abolqasem Ferdowsi wanted to control how their respective dynasties would be controlled. Both *The Shāhnāmeḥ* and *The Qābusnāmeḥ* are intended to preserve the legacy of rulers and kingdoms. However, they are intended to do so for distinct reasons and audiences. *The Qābusnāmeḥ* is a practical guide to political maneuvering written for an elite audience of nobles and princes and designed to keep kings alive and in power. As such, its advice is distinctly amoral, and deals far more with the appearance of what is right than with actual ethical behavior. Whereas, *The Shāhnāmeḥ* is an epic poem about ideals, intended to glorify Persian kingship and to revile other, unworthy rulers. As a result, it is full of Persian kings and heroes who are incessantly noble, even when their nobility results in death and destruction.

Although they both deal with the question of how kings should behave, the advice of Kay Kāvus and Ferdowsi are entirely different; Ferdowsi is discussing the preservation of an ideal of kingship, whereas Kay Kāvus is discussing the preservation of the king himself. In this, we see that the legacy of a reign is dependent on where a ruler wants power to remain long-after his death. Kay Kāvus demonstrates a reign and a ruler that sought to keep those in power with power, whereas Ferdowsi demonstrates an attempt to keep Persian power, historically and regionally, intact. Although the success of these separate attempts at preservation are still up for debate, the history surrounding these accounts is controlled by the authors who penned them, meaning that what we know is dependent on what they chose to emphasize as crucial to understanding power in post-Abbasid Persia.

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Laying the Foundation in America: How Old-World Perceptions Shaped the New

By Alex Wood

Introduction

The New World surprised many of the Spanish and English colonists by challenging their religious and cultural beliefs. When the explorers and colonists encountered the North American landscape, it had, to a certain extent, frightened some of the colonists and inspired them to control the land. This led to the destroying of the existing landscape and replacing it by plowing and customizing the earth to match similar soils in Europe. This was done by incorporating European seeds, animals, and goods that shifted the preexisting landscape of the New World to look more like Europe. Along with those physical changes came the change of ideas in the New World that organized people's daily lives.

Much of early North American colonial legislation was informed by religious and social concepts that were conceived by elite Europeans in the Old and New World. Coercion existed in society due to the creations of distinctions between race, gender, and appearance based off the social and legal outcomes coming from an elite class that did not interact with the general population. With the clashing of cultures during the creation of the North American colonies, there was a massive amount of inequality and inequity among inhabitants.

Using documents from primary sources and prior research, this paper looks at the ways in which the elites Europeans and the colonists shaped North America from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries. While there was much strife between the European colonists, Native Americans, African-American slaves, and women, the perceptions of the Old World shaped the New World both socially and physically; this friction from the Old to New World in turn has allowed the construction of the current social makeup of North America to be fueled with racial, cultural, and expansionists ideologies.

Disregarding Natives

There were two different colonial Christian perspectives: Spanish Catholic and English Protestant. While English Protestants colonized North America, Spanish Catholics colonized Mexico as well as Central and South America. Because of the European rivalry, the English Protestants tried to separate themselves and classify themselves as more civilized, while arguing that Catholics were barbaric invaders. While theologically, Catholics and Protestants believe in the same savior, they differ in specific religious and social aspects which set them apart from Catholics. Despite these differences, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches employed similar methods for shaping the New World, one of those methods was using religion to convert other groups of people to Christianity.

To legitimize colonization of the New World as a holy concept, the English Protestants used Satan to paint everything unknown as evil and ripe for purification. The Spanish Catholics used Satan to show that the native peoples were the Devil's demons and minions. In confirming this Jorge Canizares-Esguerra in his work, *Puritan Conquistadors*, states, "the satanic epic and demonology impacted Puritan culture from Iberian roots in exorcism."¹ Throughout his work,

¹ Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1500-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 215.

Esguerra explains how religious-minded the Europeans were as they colonized the New World. In trying to exemplify this he states, “Satan behaved as [hail and gale], scorching, drying, and destroying the fruit of virtue growing in the hearts and souls of Indians.”² By viewing the indigenous populations as the Devil’s followers and lovers of self, idols etc., the Europeans saw it fit to take away their land and their way of life to save everyone else from Satan. This was practiced in both the Americas and the Caribbean as well. These attitudes, in turn, suppressed indigenous people and caused unrest in native populations.

Colonists used religious mandates from both Spanish Catholic and English Protestant faiths to expand their domain and conquer the indigenous peoples around them. Because these faiths had a strong influence on people’s daily lives, it was expected that the religious population would agree with the Church. Race and ethnicity were used by groups to define themselves or others, and to convey a variety of attributes simultaneously.³ This was done by the religious elites in America that wanted to separate the “savages” from the “civil” for the purpose of structurally organizing the socio-economic class system. Colonialism was socially and politically supported because there was an economic and nationalistic status quo to be upheld. This came from the urge to develop new land and create more opportunities for trade from the preexisting ideology of Old World Europe. Ultimately, this resulted in the disregard for the rights of the native populations in America.

Exploiting Africans

In the New World (primarily North America) slaves played a significant role in creating the structures that carried out the institutional concepts from the ruling elite. There was slavery in the Old World that occurred across Asia, Africa, and Europe, which was expanded to a large, transcontinental, and commercial scale to North America that was unprecedented. While there might have been minor cases of slaves captured between warring tribes in North America, there was no large scale economic focus before that made people’s bodies a property for life.

Slavery was not considered to be a sin because according to slave traders and men of capital supporting government officials of the time, colonists across the New World could have free labor. This systematically oppressed people of color. Betty Wood’s work *The Origins of American Slavery*, describes how many Europeans started to gather racially biased perceptions of Africans. She explains that,

Over the years, Elite Englishmen had formed some of their impressions of Africa and its inhabitants through their reading of works of ancient Greek and Roman writers. For more humble English men and women, the bible was an important, and before the sixteenth century probably the main source of information about Africa and African peoples.⁴

Because of the noted difference in physical features such as skin color and facial appearance, the biased information was not challenged; the early notions on Africans were assumed to be true. These same notions on race helped European states and colonies by allowing slave traders to provide the free labor that was needed for economic stability during the creation of the North

² Canizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, 5.

³ Franklin W. Knight, *General History of the Caribbean: The Slave Societies of the Caribbean* (UNESCO: Macmillan Caribbean, 1997), 5.

⁴ Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 22.

American colonies. Due to those circumstances, slavery was solidified as a Christian tradition to slave traders and those who upheld the status quo of slavery were the same people that made slavery legal and moral. An example of this can be seen in the Old Testament book of Jewish law Leviticus 25:39-42 which states, "If your brother with you becomes so poor that he sells himself to you, you are not to make him serve like a bond slave. Instead, he is to serve with you like a hired servant."⁵ This meant that if an individual had found themselves in position of major debt, they were to work off that debt as a servant free of charge and supports the social acceptance of both free and slave labor. Which, in reflection, is a corruption of Christian scriptures used for profit through free labor.

Another way slaves were accepted in Western society can be shown in the legal definition of slaves being considered property in the court of law. An example of this can be seen through a law entitled *Maryland Addresses the Status of Slaves in 1664*, which states, "and all children born of any Negro or other slaves shall be slaves as their fathers were for the term of their lives."⁶ This law shows how African slaves were an example of a group of people whom the colonies degraded through legislation. With the state of Maryland having to clarify who the slaves reveal how the colonies viewed African inhabitants. The document even comments on the color of skin by saying "negros" implying darker skinned peoples, whereas native peoples were usually either referred to as savages or not regarded at all as an attempt to disregard and marginalize other non-White populations. Because of this oppression, being white came to have certain privileges that were not given to non-White people. The racial perception of people was quickly challenged by society, but due to influence from the Protestant and the Catholic Churches, opposition to the racial status quo did not gain enough momentum to change the dynamics of society.

Colonists used legal restrictions against Africans and used religion to justify these actions. In the eyes of colonists, Africans were not worthy of rights or respect. Most Americans were dirty by modern standards, but Black Americans came in the harshest scrutiny and description.⁷ This recorded law clearly states even after slavery was abolished, the Black population in America was still expected to reside in lower living conditions than the rest of the New World. Aside from the belief that equality never truly existed, Black Americans have remained on a lower social stratum because of their past circumstances through the bondage of slavery and colonialism.

Marginalizing Women

While Native Americans and Black Americans were treated poorly, white women were considered second class citizens. With a cultural emphasis on constraining women from Old World practices, the New World saw similar gender inequality in the colonies. It was the normative scenario for the wife to be considered property of her husband. The man held more power over the woman not just in the household, but in the public domain as well.

In the colonial period, the social and political relationship between men and women was tied to power. In Kathleen Brown's *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs*, she examines the social and political relations between men and women during the colonial. Brown reveals the perceptions Europeans had on gender when she states, "the alleged physical and moral weakness of women provided authors with a useful metaphor for explaining other relations of

⁵ Leviticus 25:39-42 King James Version.

⁶ William H. Browne, ed., "Maryland Addresses the Status of Slavery in 1664," *Archives of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1883), 533.

⁷ Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790 – 1840, Everyday Life in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 163.

dominance and submission.”⁸ There was no real scientific evidence of women’s place, it was all conceptual. Women were not attributed to maintaining any power, rather this was left to men. Because of this, women were not viewed as worthy in society beyond a household setting.

Defining the restrictions concerning women became a major focal point in the colonies. Powerful male colonists sought any justification in setting up barriers to keep women from gaining any power in society. According to Brown, “relying on ancient texts, sixteenth-century writers drew analogies from this universal female subordination to establish and explain the naturalness of the political order.”⁹ Because there were laws being made and enforced solely on the grounds of gender, the social divides were strengthening within the colony. Colonist sought to model the New World gender dynamics off the practices in Europe; in doing so, this ensured that men would have power in the colonies and women were expected to be submissive.

Colonists did not want women in positions of power and authority. Women were marginalized, and this left them on a lower tier in society. Women were viewed as needing protection and maintenance and men were considered the appropriate deciders. Laws were set in place to ensure the immobility of women in society. Individuals had the legal justification and language to keep women in a lower status in comparison to men, and overtime, this moved beyond a legal entity. Because the Old-World beliefs continued in the New World, women became trapped in these categories of unworthiness and weakness that still plagued women long after the establishment of the colonies.

Conclusion

Pre-existing European perceptions justified colonization by religiously mandating that certain groups of individuals would be controlled. Native Americans were deemed savages and expected to be civilized based on standards created by colonizers. As a result, land belonging to Native Americans was seized without regard to the negative effects this would cause. Africans were considered property which resulted in their dehumanization. Held down by the confines of slavery, Africans were labeled as inferior and this made it difficult to separate notions of inferiority from the African body. Women were marginalized and held to a status attributed to weakness. In keeping women subordinate to men in all sectors, colonists ensured that power extended far beyond notions of race; gender became a marker of power as well.

The beliefs and perceptions of individuals coming from the Old World to the New World are important when understanding divides in American society. This early history reveals that America was founded upon the desire to keep certain people in power. European elites who came to the New World wanted to maintain power and calm any potential threat to this power. To do that, laws were set in place to add justification to societal divides. Race and gender were believed to be indicators of whether an individual would have power or a voice. These beliefs continued to hold weight long after the establishment of the colonies and it ultimately laid the foundation for how we view race and gender as markers of worthiness in American society.

⁸Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 13.

⁹ Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 15.

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Feeding an Image: The Spatio-Economic Logic of Taco Shops in Merced, California

By Adriano Dore Gomes Da Costa¹

Introduction

The city of Merced is home to individuals of diverse backgrounds all looking to have an impact on the formation of Merced's identity. Food is an integral part of every community and plays a significant role constructing the image of an area. Food allows people to express their culture and reminds them of their past. Merced's food identity reflects the city's diversity. Like any other city, Merced has districts divided and formed based on economic and social status that play a role in shaping the image of an area, particularly areas dealing with food.

The spatial divisions of Merced impact how restaurants have a role in dictating and feeding their consumer base. Merced has a reputation associated with decline and debt. The city ranked ninth on the "50 Worst American Cities to Live In" lists because of prominent levels of poverty and unemployment.² Many associate the north side of Highway 99 with wealth and progress, whereas, the south side is connected to poverty and decline. I theorize that the location of the taco shops in Merced's urban space influences their business and clientele because it is tied to these preconceived notions of poverty and progress.

For about four months, I have explored the city of Merced and found that the locations of the taco shops are interesting with regards to their location in the urban space. Independent research, which includes mapping and observing taco shops, provides the basis for my thesis. I constructed a map of the city of Merced and highlighted the taco shops of the area. The basis of my analysis will focus on four of Merced's popular taco shops. With the locations pinpointed in relation to the rest of the urban space, I theorize two categories of taco shops: attached and standalone shops. The attached shops were either a part of a building or connected to other shops. The standalone shops had no structural connections to other buildings or shops.

In focusing on these two categories, I argue that the taco shops reflect the power businesses have in selecting their customer-base by carefully choosing their location in Merced's urban space. I framed my map around the arguments made in Rebecca Solnit's *Infinite City*. According to Solnit, "a map is in its essence and intent an arbitrary selection of information."³ Space is defined by individuals and businesses claiming territories and attributing importance to the given area. In Merced, space is defined by physical borders that impact the formation of an area's food identity. Merced's taco shops reveal that physical location in urban space impacts the image of a given taco shop; this ultimately dictates the type of customer that will do business there and this contributes to the image the taco shop is attempting to portray alongside Merced's reputation.

Mapping Out Taco Shops

The following map focuses on Merced and emphasizes the location of four popular taco shops. The map's northern and southern edges are extended from Yosemite Avenue to Childs

¹ The author, being also an editor, recused himself from the editing process regarding this article. It received no special treatment and was required to conform to all standard requirements.

² Thaddeus Miller, "Is Merced really that bad of a place to live? Depends who you ask," *Merced Sun-Star*, June 28, 2017.

³ Rebecca Solnit, Ben Pease, and Shizue Sigel, *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 1.

Avenue, while the western and eastern edges are extended from Highway 59 to Kibby Road. The four shops that are the basis for my research are: Jose’s Taco Shop, El Asadero Taco Shop, Taqueria El Palmar, and Taqueria El Huarache.

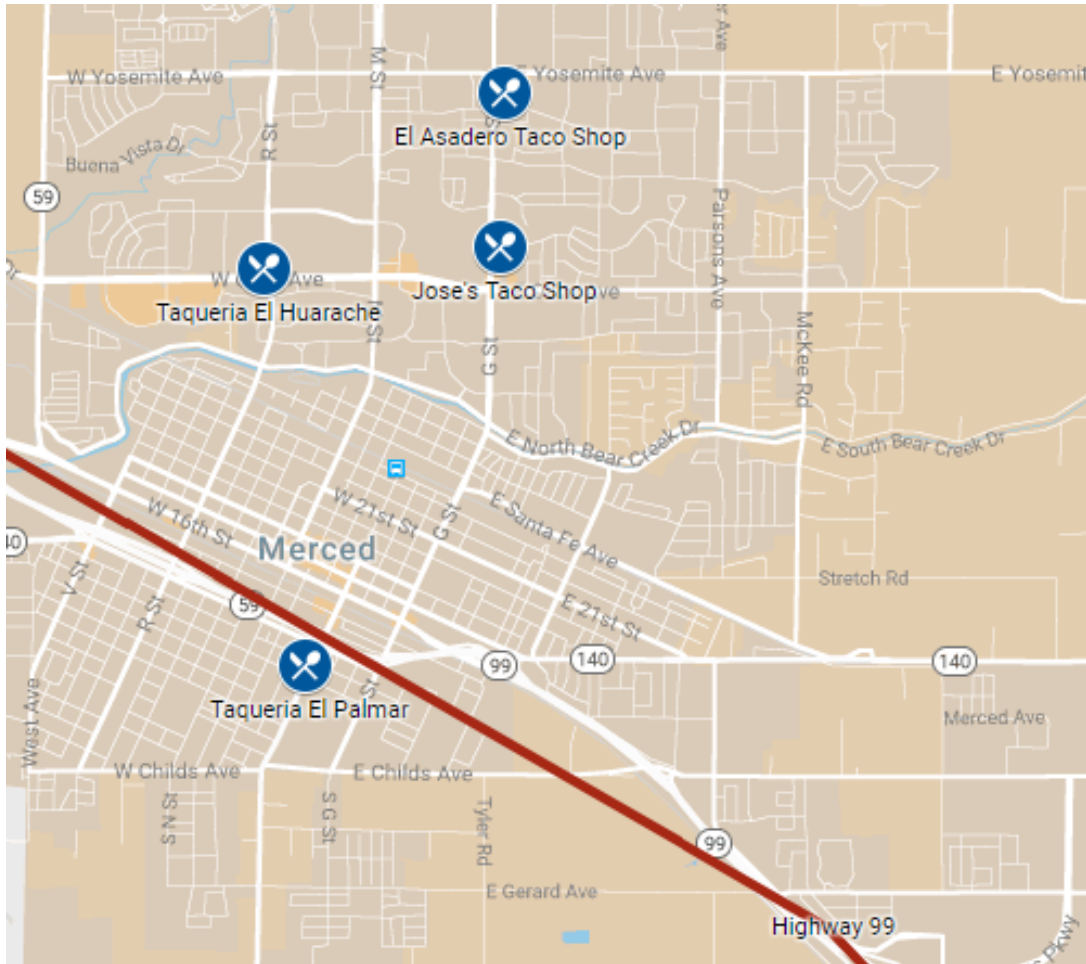


Figure 1: Map of Merced highlighting the four taco shops of my research and Highway 99 ⁴

The attached taco shops in my research are Jose’s Taco Shop and El Asadero Taco Shop. The standalone taco shops in my research are Taqueria El Palmar and Taqueria El Huarache. Besides the taco shops on the map, the major feature of this map is Highway 99. The map places the taco shops in Merced’s urban space for a general understanding of where my research took place.

⁴“Merced, California,” Google Maps, accessed February 13, 2018.

The map below also focuses on Merced, but with an emphasis on poverty levels.

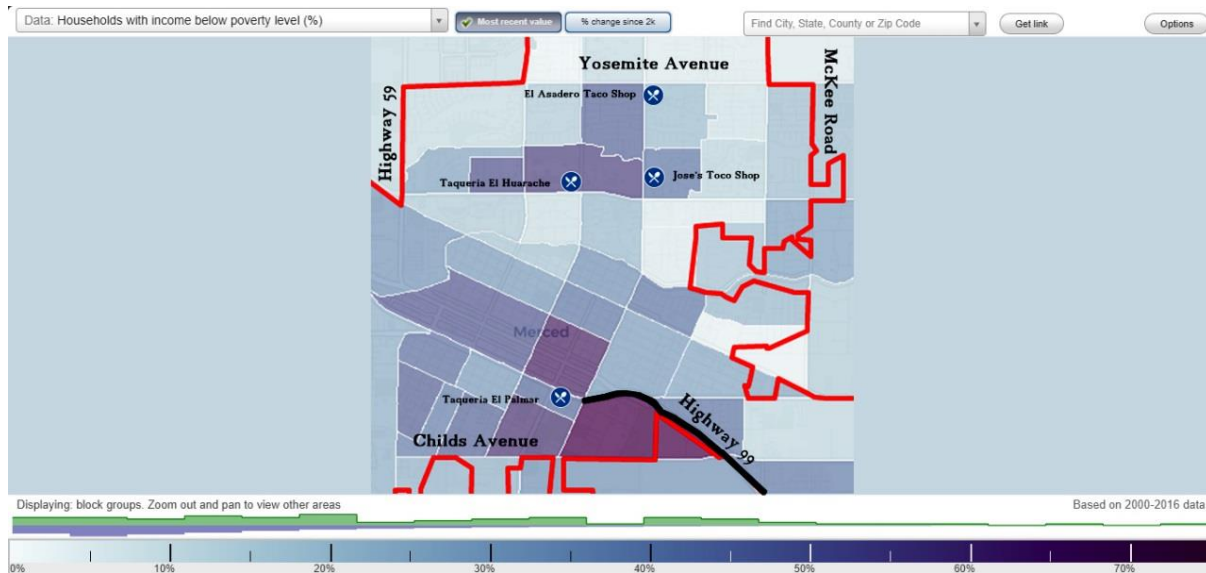


Figure 2: Households with Income Below Poverty Level (%) in Merced, California ⁵

As mentioned, Highway 99 is a significant divider in Merced; being located North of Highway 99 is attributed to higher status and progress, whereas South of Highway 99 is associated with the opposite. With poverty levels measured by City-Data.com, the shading indicates households with income below poverty level in terms of percentages. The deeper shade of purple in a given area reveals a larger percentage below the poverty level. The location, in relation to the poverty level, of a given taco shop plays a key role in the overall image presented to the customers. Ultimately, the image of a business will dictate the type of customers and define the how the restaurant is perceived alongside other urban characteristics in Merced, California.

Attached Taco Shops

The two attached taco shops that I am focusing on are Jose’s Taco Shop and El Asadero. Both are located along G Street, north of Highway 99. Being in a good area of town and offering practicality to the customers is the major aspect in all business. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the attached taco shops are in wealthier areas. This allows for these two taco shops to appear as if when one chooses this establishment over another, one is presenting an image of higher status for themselves. When it comes to location, class matters. This feeds into the notion that wealthy customers eat at these establishments, tip more, and have the potential to spend more money because they have that luxury.

Jose’s Taco Shop is in a little conglomeration with two other stores. It is located across from Merced High School and down the street from Olive Avenue and the Bear Creek shopping center. Jose’s Taco Shop’s location enables it to experience lots of walking traffic because it is in front of a high school and secondly it has residential apartments and homes right behind it. Daniel Burnham in his *Plan of Chicago* had such an observation in that streets, avenues and parkways,

⁵ “Households with income below poverty level (%) in Merced, California,” City-Data.com, accessed February 13, 2018.

should be wide enough to provide two broad parallel roadways: one to be used by those who wish to visit the shops, hotels, or theatres, and the other for the passage of those who do not care to stop on their way through the city. Between these roadways should be a broad sidewalk, and the walk next to the buildings also should be very broad."⁶

The idea is that when planning a location, store or even a city, if you have a large enough space for people to walk around, find the location, and feel safe, people will go.

The location of Jose's Taco Shop allows for it to receive a wide variety of customers. Jose's Taco Shop is not only in a more affluent area of town but is also in one of the more practical locations for a business. As mentioned, Jose's Taco Shop is located near a high school and shopping center; ultimately, this taco shop uses its image and location to accumulate even more wealth. I argue that a practical customer, an individual that chooses a taco shop because of its location in urban space, will see Jose's Taco Shop as a viable option. This customer will go there because the shop is close to their school, job, or home. Because the location of Jose's Taco Shop in Merced's urban space can bring in a large amount of people, this strengthens the notion that being located in the "good part of town" benefits a taco shop's image.

El Asadero is in a strip mall at the crossroad of two major streets: Yosemite Avenue and G Street. It has the advantage of being in the same general area as Raley's and other upscale shops. El Asadero is the closest taco shop to UC Merced and Merced Junior College. In exploring this area, I noticed that this strip mall location offered more traffic other than the taco shops located closer to the Merced Mall. Many students, faculty, and wealthier people head to this strip mall making for the appearance of a good clientele for El Asadero.

Because El Asadero is in a wealthier sector of town and presents an image to reflect this notion, word soon spreads around Merced. In talking about work, Solnit states, "A friend or family member tells you there is work here. They pull you in, and you pull in the next guy... it's a thread that winds onto itself."⁷ Although Solnit is speaking in regard to work, the same logic can be applied to food. Once word spreads that El Asadero is a good taco shop located an upscale and safe area, individuals are more likely to keep going there. El Asadero is a prime example of a taco shop where its location is a major asset in its business.

Jose's Taco Shop and El Asadero benefit from being in the more affluent sectors of Merced, California. These taco shops can afford to reside in an upscale neighborhood and this translates into receiving wealthier customers. In observing these establishments, many of the customers were college students who are more likely to be able to spend more than local residents who fall below the poverty line. The strip mall taco shops in my research are using the appearance of the urban space around them to segregate themselves from other taco shops to be presented in a stronger regard in connection to Merced's overall image.

Standalone Taco Shops

The two standalone taco shops I will be focusing on are Taqueria El Huarache and Taqueria El Palmar. In comparison to the attached taco shops, these shops have a different foot print in Merced's urban space. It is interesting to note that, as demonstrated in Figure 2, Taqueria El Huarache is located north of Highway 99, whereas, Taqueria El Palmar is located south of Highway 99. However, both taco shops are in sectors of Merced with higher levels of poverty.

⁶ Daniel Burnham, *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: Commercial Club of Chicago, 1909), 100

⁷ Solnit, *Infinite City*, 95.

This connection plagues both locations with being tied to notions of lower status. Because of this, I observed that these locations did not receive the same type of customers as the attached taco shops received. I argue that the physical space these shops reside inadvertently ties these shops to the negative reputation of Merced.

Taqueria El Huarache is located on R Street and is surrounded by businesses and residential areas. I observed this taco shop as more of a destination than anything else. Located by other businesses some of its business tended to come from surrounding employees. This is interesting because Taqueria El Huarache is located near Jose's Taco Shops and El Rodondo, which is a section of town where many college students live. However, the segregation of wealth of its urban space controls the type of customer it will receive on a given day. Josh Sides mentions disparities in wealth in *L.A. City Limits* when he discusses the growth of black neighborhoods after the Second World War. According to Sides, "The neighborhoods formed as black communities because of the lack of other housing options for them, so they all unwillingly self-segregated because that's the only place they could live."⁸ This applies to food as well. The prices of food inadvertently segregate customers based on disposable income. The taco shops who can afford to reside in an upscale neighborhood will do so while those without the means will be forced to locate themselves in less expensive areas.

Taqueria El Palmar is very different from all the other taco shops I have talked about. All the other taco shops are on the north side of Highway 99. Whereas, Taqueria El Palmar is not located near the colleges, schools, government buildings, residential neighborhoods or the town center. The south side is the industrial district, meaning those who live there are people who cannot afford the more expensive real estate of the non-industrial district. According to Burnham, "it is also apparent that suburban towns should be connected with one another in the best manner."⁹ Being located south of Highway 99 leaves Taqueria El Palmar an outlier that is not connected to the other taco shops. This impacts the level of business it can receive and the image of Taqueria El Palmar ultimately gets tied directly to this preconceived notion of decline.

In observing Taqueria El Palmar, I noticed it received little to no student traffic or "wealthy" clients. This is because it is located by itself, far away from UC Merced, away from the upscale neighborhoods and shopping traffic. Any customer could say Taqueria El Palmar has the best food in the world, but this word-of-mouth would need to spread across differing communities. Whereas the attached taco shops are in upscale communities, Taqueria El Palmar is an example of a blighted community. Blighted neighborhoods mean blighted lives – like the bad boy in school who requires so much of the teacher's attention – throw a heavy burden on public agencies at the expense of the rest of the community.¹⁰ It will take a long time for the word to spread from one community to the other, since these communities are separated by tracks, roads, house prices, distance, location, and wealth. This leaves the experience that Taqueria El Palmar can offer to potential customers to go unnoticed because its location and surroundings does not present the progressive image we see with the attached shops.

Taqueria El Huarache and Taqueria El Palmar are greatly impacted by their urban surroundings. Both taco shops are in areas concentrated in high levels of poverty and because of this, the image they project is molded by that notion. Being in poorer sectors hinders these shops

⁸Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 93-97.

⁹ Burnham, *Plan of Chicago*, 38.

¹⁰ Dawn Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 278.

from receiving wealthier customers because of the connections individuals make with appearance and quality. Taqueria El Huarache and Taqueria El Palmar are more likely to be visited by loyal customers, those who go to these taco shops regardless of its location in Merced's urban space. However, it is difficult for these shops to move beyond these loyal customers because it is difficult to for a business to disconnect itself from its physical surroundings.

Conclusion

In analyzing four major taco shops in Merced, I have found that the urban divisions within the spatio-economic space of the city have a profound impact on the appearance of the taco shops. The food identity of each taco shop is formed based on the urban characteristics of their surroundings. In observing the attached shops, Jose's Taco Shop and El Asadero, I found that their positioning in Merced's wealthier sector benefitted their overall image in building a strong customer base. They use this connection to the wealthier sector to strengthen their overall image; the attached taco shops realize that individuals tie the appearance of wealth to better quality, so this benefits their business overall. In observing the standalone taco shops, Taqueria El Huarache and Taqueria El Palmar, I found that their locations in Merced's poorer sectors presents a different overall image in comparison to the attached shops. Being in areas with higher concentrations of poverty, ties these taco shops to notions of poverty and individuals associate the appearance of poverty in a business to poorer quality.

The urban characteristics of Merced are crucial in understanding the divides in the city, but more importantly, the impact urban surroundings have on the businesses. Location and appearance are important because individuals make connections and choices based on what a business can appear to offer. Regardless of the quality of the food, individuals are more likely to frequent a taco shop located in a more appealing area because it contributes to the notion that appearance translates into better quality. Because of this, urban characteristics allow for the attached taco shops to bring in a variety of customers, whereas the standalone taco shops are more likely to rely on loyal customers to compete financially. Although urban space should be considered when choosing where to eat, individuals need to be wary that only taking appearance and location into consideration feeds into an image that strengthens the divides within Merced through food.

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