

Therefore, I argue that the application of paternalism in order to prevent patients from exercising their autonomous right to undergo an elective amputation is justified by the Theory of Future Consent. It is reasonable to argue that, in the very near future, brain stimulation techniques will be able to address the functional brain deficiencies observed in patients with BIID. Once the uncharacteristic patterns of brain activity in these patients are restored, the patients will likely display a radical improvement with regard to their feelings of limb ownership and would utterly reject the idea of voluntary mutilation; the patients’ autonomy would have therefore been restored and they would likely agree with the limits that were placed on their autonomy. In the meantime, through the administration of SSRIs and antidepressants, the suffering of patients with BIID can be minimized while also preventing them from undergoing elective amputations that they would likely consider harmful if they were to regain a fully autonomous status. It is evident that placing limits on the autonomy of patients with BIID protects their bodily integrity, prevents them from making ill-informed medical decisions, and allows physicians to alleviate the suffering of their patients (despite the fact that they must delay their patients’ cure.)

Conclusion

While Bayne and Levy’s argument for permitting elective amputations was more plausible when the neural basis of BIID was poorly understood, recent findings have strongly linked BIID with functional abnormalities in the premotor cortex. The legitimization of BIID as a condition with a biological cause dispels common misconceptions about the validity of psychological illnesses and establishes an imperative for promptly finding an effective cure for BIID. Nevertheless, since patients desiring elective amputations suffer from impaired brain function that leads them to desire treatments that would physically disable them, certain limits must be placed on their autonomy and, as such, not all forms of treatment for BIID are ethically acceptable. As new forms of brain stimulation that could reestablish patients’ feelings of limb ownership loom on the horizon, and pharmacotherapy is available to temporarily alleviate suffering, the imposition of paternalistic limits on patient autonomy proves to be the soundest ethical choice. Paternalism is further supported by the belief that, once these patients regain their autonomy, they would agree that preventing them from undergoing elective amputations was the most morally responsible action. This leads one to further consider the extent to which BIID will be recognized by society as the devastating illness that it is, and how current healthcare delivery models and insurance policies will adjust to encompass this previously overlooked and misunderstood condition.

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From a Whisper to a Shout: Whisper Networks and #MeToo as Forms of Resistance

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Contrary to romantic notions about the sudden explosion of women’s anger after decades of sexual harassment, the #MeToo movement is strongly grounded in a history of resistance. This paper traces the roots of the #MeToo movement in whisper networks that women use to pass along information about which men are harassers and should be avoided. Drawing on a variety of published accounts as well as my own experience as an advocate and a member of a whisper network, I analyze the characteristics of whisper networks. I argue that these whisper networks constitute a moral community of women opposed to sexual harassment. Furthermore, whisper networks enable women’s covert resistance by giving meaning to their small, isolated acts of defiance. This argument provides support for the relevance of peasant resistance studies to understanding contemporary subaltern groups. At the same time, whisper networks mark the tacit acceptance of sexual harassment as a culturally intimate aspect of most American institutions. While this intimacy gains public expression in modern populist politics, the #MeToo movement realizes a countertendency by publicizing and attempting to institutionalize whisper networks.

From Whisper Networks to #MeToo¹

A recent string of high-profile sexual harassment allegations, dubbed the #MeToo movement, is bringing much-needed attention to the far-reaching nature and implications of sexual harassment. As has become clear, sexual harassment is a widespread abuse of power tacitly condoned by men within most American institutions. Yet beyond bringing this to light, the #MeToo movement also represents the beginning of a new political contest over gender hierarchies in the workplace. Without a doubt, #MeToo has the potential to transform some aspects of American society. Nevertheless, decontextualizing this movement from a long history of women’s resistance to institutionally tolerated sexual harassment risks romanticizing resistance as the eventual explosion of a human tendency for justice. In reality, the #MeToo movement has its roots in whisper networks that women use to pass along information about which men are harassers and should be avoided. In this paper, I argue that these whisper networks constitute a moral community of women opposed to sexual harassment, which gives meaning to individual practices of everyday resistance, and generates the moral outrage expressed in #MeToo. At the same time, whisper networks mark the tacit acceptance of sexual harassment as a culturally intimate aspect of most American institutions. As this intimacy gains public expression in modern populist politics, the #MeToo movement realizes a countertendency by publicizing and attempting to institutionalize the heretofore covert resistance of whisper networks.

Whisper networks are the chains of communication between women in institutions that spread warnings about who has a history of sexual harassment (Creswell and Hsu 2017; McKinney 2017; Meza 2017; Tolentino 2017)². These networks have long existed, but

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²In this paper I use the term “sexual harassment” as the broad category under which most acts circulated by whisper networks are described; however, a number of other acts extending to sexual assault and rape also fall into this category.

became the subject of public scrutiny when it became clear that most women professionally connected to the men implicated in the recent string of sexual harassment accusations knew of their behaviors. In the highly publicized case of film magnate Harvey Weinstein, Hollywood women warned each other about his style of operating and shared advice, such as to “dress frumpy” when meeting with him (Farrow 2017). In another case, women in small-town Alabama knew that Judge Roy Moore, who is alleged to have assaulted a number of young girls, was a frequent visitor to a local mall, and advised young girls to stay away (Meza 2017). In these and many other instances, the #MeToo movement brought to light long-standing whisper networks (Creswell and Hsu 2017). Importantly, women form whisper networks within workplaces rather than around individual abusers. Institutions and industries where women and men are professionally affiliated, including but not limited to universities, large companies, Hollywood, New York journalism, Silicon Valley, and Wall Street all contain their own whisper networks. For this paper, I will examine the whisper networks in Hollywood and in New York media by drawing on the many firsthand and journalistic accounts of both shared in the months following the Weinstein allegations. I will also draw on my personal experience as an anti-sexual violence advocate and a member of the whisper network at Harvard, where I am an undergraduate.

While whisper networks sometimes contain widely shared open secrets, they are exclusive to women and, to a limited degree, gay men. In the conversations that I have had in preparing this paper, most women that I spoke with were not familiar with the term “whisper network,” but immediately understood what I meant when I described the practice of asking for and passing along information about sexual harassers. Most men, however, were not aware of this practice. For instance, when a male friend overheard myself and two other friends discussing his buddy’s sexist behavior, he was appalled to hear me passing along such damning criticisms. I struggled to explain to him that women share such information in order to protect themselves, because it is often hard to tell which “nice guys” are actually harassers or misogynists, and not just to attack unfortunate men. My friend’s confusion demonstrated that whisper networks are exclusive to women, who are particularly

vulnerable to sexual harassment. Gay men are sometimes included, but often not. As Jesse Dorris has written in response to allegations of sexual harassment within the gay community, “gay men need a whisper network, too” because existing networks do not serve them (Dorris 2017). Some whisper networks also exclude on the base of race or class, and few accommodate the particular sexual harassment experienced by LGBT people. The impact of this exclusion is magnified because those excluded from whisper networks are in many cases already more vulnerable to sexual harassment – for instance, LGBT people, people of color, and people new to an industry (Shafir 2017). The discriminatory nature of whisper networks is likely the most significant limitation of their usefulness, as many voices in the #MeToo movement have emphasized. However, whisper networks generally extend to all women within a given institution. Critically, this includes women who have not personally experienced harassment but still receive and pass along information.

In contrast to whisper networks that are local to a particular institution, the #MeToo movement is publicly exposing, on an unprecedented scale, high-profile sexual harassers. The concept of “me too” originated with activist Tarana Burke in 2006, who at the time was working with black and brown girls and wanted to validate their experiences of sexual assault. It therefore began as an inward-facing project of “survivors helping survivors” (Lopez and Snyder 2017). More recently, the hashtag #MeToo went viral on social media in the wake of revelations that Harvey Weinstein had for decades used his power and influence to assault young actresses (Dibdin 2017). Actress Alyssa Milano suggested on Twitter that “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem” (Fance 2017). This viral hashtag shifted #MeToo from a focus on support and healing to and outward-facing focus on revealing the extent of sexual assault for a broader public, including men. However, while most social media posts of #MeToo left the perpetrators anonymous, they triggered a third phase of #MeToo, which I make the main focus of this paper: a series of public accusations against men in powerful positions that they have used their power to commit sexual assault or harassment. Most of these accusations have gained considerable press coverage, and have been corroborated by photographic evidence or by the agreement of multiple accusers. As of this writing, over 200 public figures have been accused (North 2017). While public accusations of sexual assault and harassment have a long history, the #MeToo movement marks the first time that so many accusations have occurred in such a short span of time, and the first time that such accusations could constitute a movement. By comparison, just last year, a series of assault accusation against Bill Cosby resulted in a hung jury, but nothing like the outpouring of the #MeToo movement (Zeitchik 2016). As proponent Kelsey McKinney wrote, “the dam broke” (McKinney 2017). While its impact remains indeterminate, the #MeToo movement signifies an important change in how sexual assault claims are received.

As survivors of sexual harassment, anti-sexual violence activists, and defenders of the accused have argued, the #MeToo movement bears certain imperfections. For instance, many survivors have expressed frustration about the pressure that the movement exerts on them to publicly share their intimate and often traumatic experiences. Additionally, the #MeToo movement does not effectively extend to the many people, typically working-class women, whose

harassers are not high-profile enough to generate media interest but still use their positions of power to abuse female workers (Alianza Nacional de Campesinas 2017). Another concern is that the media exposition of alleged harassers often forces them out of positions without a fair trial or a chance to defend themselves against the charges. Anti-sexual violence advocates argue that the system of trial by press is not a solution, but merely reflects that the systems intended to provide justice, from human resources departments within institutions to the justice system within the United States, make it nearly impossible for survivors to successfully make claims against perpetrators. Of course, two wrongs do not make a right, and there is a small possibility that false accusers would exploit #MeToo movement for their own ends³. However, the focus of this paper will not be on defending the #MeToo movement or re-litigating the accusations against its growing list of abusers. Instead, I explain the social foundations for the movement, and argue that these account for many of the tensions between it and existing judicial structures.

Whispering Together: Gossip as a form of Resistance

Whisper networks are a form of gossip, but they are not mere gossip. Rather, as anthropologists Gluckman and F.G. Bailey argue, gossip is often critical to establishing and maintaining a moral community. Developing his study of European peasant societies in *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation*, Bailey writes that a moral community is a “sphere of action in which moral claims are made” (Bailey 1971, 191). In other words, moral communities are composed of people who are prepared to issue moral judgments about each other. In doing so, they draw on a set of shared values, although the exact application of those values is a site of social contest. Thus, the moral community is both contested and maintained through the exchange of moral judgment – gossip. Gossip regulates membership within a moral community by establishing each member’s reputation relative to the values of the culture within which they are judged. As a result, gossiping reifies those values (Bailey 1971, 7). Gossip itself is a mode of communication for the moral community. Gluckman’s description of the Makah, a small American Indian tribe, illustrates this point nicely: “values of the group are clearly asserted in gossip and scandal...[gossip can] control disputation by allowing each individual or clique to fight fellow members of the larger group with an acceptable, socially instituted customary weapon” (Gluckman 1963, 313). Gossip is a particular language for members of a group to talk about how well each other member performs as a member of that group and therefore, indirectly, to talk about the group itself. Thus, when gossip says that Max is not a true Makah, at the same it asserts that the gossip is a true Makah, and knows what it means to be Makah. Gossiping about shared information also reminds any outsider listening that they do not belong. In this way, gossip highlights the exclusion of those who and are not members of the group by drawing on the shared knowledge and history of the moral community (Gluckman 1963, 313). Moreover, as Bailey argues, gossip shapes the reputation of the gossip as well as the object of their gossip. To improve

³While false accusations do occur, and raise a significant concern, they are much less frequent than critics of the #MeToo movement imply. For instance, a recent study at a large Northeastern university found that the false accusation rate was between 2 and 10% (Lisak et al. 2010). Moreover, few false accusations have consequences, as most are withdrawn; for instance, in a study by the British Home Office of rapes reported to the police, only 6 of 216 false allegations led to an arrest, and only 2 led to charges (Kelly, Lovett, and Regan 2005).

their reputation, the gossip must convey true information with the correct moral valence to their audience (Bailey 1971, 7). If the gossip is concerned that the story will turn out to be untrue, or is concerned about the reception of their moral interpretation of the story, they often sign it with a phrase like “I have just heard from Frederick that...” (Bailey 1971, 7). This signature passes along the responsibility to another person and limits the ability of any individual to deploy gossip for character assassination.

Constituted by gossip, a whisper network upholds the values and reputations of the moral community of women within an institution. Despite being deeply embedded in a broader institution, such a moral community maintains its distinctness through particular language, codes, shared histories and values, and reputations. In a particularly extreme example, many women in journalism communicated which senior editors were harassers through a code: he is either “on the Island” or not (Friedman 2012). More common idioms include “watch his hands” and “make sure you’re sober if you hang out with him”. Beyond this particular language, whisper networks also carry a memory of harassment that can help communicate new instances. For instance, if the whisper network has parsed the stories about Steve, a serial harasser, a member might say that “the new professor is a total Steve” to warn those in the know. Most importantly, women use whisper networks to transmit judgment about harassers based on the moral valence of certain acts. Such judgments maintain a set of shared (and contested) values about what constitutes harassment and how wrong it is. Finally, consistent with Bailey’s observations, gossip shapes the reputation of each member of a whisper network. Jia Tolentino, herself a member of multiple whisper networks over the course of her career, writes that “women ask for and examine sourcing” and differentiate between firsthand and second- or third-hand claims (Tolentino 2017). These source-examinations reflect the tags that gossipers use to protect their reputations while passing along valuable information. As Tolentino writes, “if I give you false information, then my credibility and relationships will suffer,” because the group of people engaged in the whisper network typically “ask around, monitor social situations, [and] shut down the rare false rumor” (Tolentino 2017). Through such checks, whisper networks protect against their abuse by women seeking to tarnish a man’s reputation. In all these ways, whisper networks help constitute and maintain the moral community of women within an institution with its own history, reputations, and common values.

Beyond maintaining this moral community, whisper networks mediate between women in an institution and the men who have power over them. Gluckman and Bailey, by focusing on gossip within relatively isolated communities, do not examine the importance of gossip about non-members. Gluckman’s teleological approach assumes that gossip’s function must accord with the community in question, disregarding outsiders and often excluding the anthropologist as well. Meanwhile, Bailey argues that the reputations of those outside the community are not judged by the same moral standards, and instead are “destroyed or employed in whatever fashion serves our interests” (Bailey 1971, 7). However, a moral community often cannot afford to simply treat outsiders in this instrumental fashion if it is, like a whisper network, deeply embedded in another community. In particular, for Bailey and Gluckman, gossip is fundamentally public, because it distributes the shared knowledge of an all-encompassing moral community. Yet even Bailey’s own ethnography does not support this position.

In a telling example, he describes the small village of 400 called Valloire, in the French Alps, where it is perfectly acceptable for men to sit in public and gossip, but women go to great length to avoid talking to each other in the open and appearing to gossip (Bailey 1971, 7). This is because men’s gossip is assumed to be bavarder, or idle chatter and news-passing; while women’s gossip is socially condemned and assumed to be *mauvaise langue*, or scandal, the passing on of defamatory information (Bailey 1971, 7). Bailey fails to explain why women are considered especially prone to mauvaise langue, and therefore must resort to covert gossip. It is not clear why women’s gossip was considered so dangerous in Vallorie, but in the case of whisper networks, it is obvious: women use gossip to share their frustration with the men who have power over them. Indeed, the particular role of gossip for a subordinated group is explored in James Scott’s theory of peasant resistance.

In *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott argues that gossip is one of the tools of everyday resistance that are widely employed in peasant societies. Scott, although a political scientist by training, bases his theory on fieldwork in Sedeka, a village in rural Malaysia with stark inequality between a class of peasants and one of landlords. Although the peasants live in a situation of near-total subjugation, Scott argues, they nevertheless engage in consistent, everyday resistance. Some common acts of everyday resistance in Sedeka include pilfering grain, informal boycotts, and squatting on public land, all of which contest power structures without endorsing “public and symbolic goals” (Scott 1985, 23). Unlike peasant rebellions, this resistance is covert, but it is just as significant in shaping society and how people live in it (Scott 1985, 23). Also unlike rebellions, everyday resistance requires barely any coordination, uses implicit understandings shared within informal networks, looks like individual self-help, and avoids direct confrontation with authority, especially on a symbolic level (Scott 1985, 23). In fact, Scott writes, “the success of de facto resistance is often directly proportional to the symbolic conformity with which it is masked” (Scott 1985, 23). Given the poverty of the peasants and their dependence on the landlords, open insubordination would have severe consequences, but covert resistance is more likely to allow its protagonists to survive. Therefore, such resistance conforms to formal hierarchies and symbolic power (Scott 1985, 23). At the same time, however, everyday resistance relies on gossip to coordinate and justify acts against power.

Gossip is a means for the dominated group to contest symbolic hierarchies of power and maintain a distinct set of shared values by which they judge themselves and others. In Sedeka, the values of the peasantry include the expectation that wealthy landlords should be generous in providing employment and assistance to the peasants of the village, and justify resistance against those who do not (Scott 1985, 23). As a result, while everyday resistance is not institutionalized, it is not fully uncoordinated (Scott 1985, 23). Individual acts are linked by peasant subcultures that contest the symbolic power of the landowners, contained in folk traditions, tales, and critically, gossip and jokes about the landowners (Scott 1985, 23). Such stories provide practical survival tips, but they also carry an implicit rejection of the status quo that makes such adaptations necessary (Scott 1985, 23). Scott terms these “transcripts” of resistance, but “scripts” might be a better term to describe this phenomenon: there are certain accepted and popular ways of speaking about the landlords and the peasant situation that contain an implicit criticism of the symbolic power structure itself. For instance, the wealthiest landlords have

Political
Anthropology

Political
Anthropology

denigrating nicknames, Haji Broom and Kadir Ceti, that peasants use widely behind their backs to refer to their ungenerous and unacceptable behaviors (Scott 1985, 23). Unlike the landlords, whose full transcripts are generally public, “the exercise of power nearly always drives a portion of the full transcript underground” (Scott 1985, 23). Nevertheless, the transcript coordinates individual actions. Gossip justifies and encourages resistance against those landlords who fall short of the moral demands of the peasantry, transforming individual and self-serving acts into a pattern of resistance (Scott 1985, 23). For instance, everyone might pilfer grain individually, and if caught use the appropriate term of address to indicate their submission to the village hierarchy of wealth and power. However, the wealthier and less generous the landlord, the more they discover that their grain is pilfered. By contesting these power structures, peasants also demonstrate their understanding of the symbolic hierarchies of power they inhabit (Scott 1985, 23). Therefore, everyday resistance occupies a middle ground between overt resistance and passive submission, where peasants do not actively pursue a radically different society but do actively imagine alternate social forms. By establishing the shared values of a moral community and constantly applying them to particular cases, gossip is critical in constructing this alternative.

Similar to peasant folk traditions, whisper networks coordinate and justify women’s everyday resistance within patriarchal institutions. Like the peasants Scott describes, women in patriarchal institutions are embedded in systems of power. In fact, Scott himself notes the parallel between his theory of resistance and the feminist literature on the myth of male dominance in peasant society, which argues that women can exert power in male-dominated societies only so far as they do not openly challenge the “formal myth of male dominance” (Scott 1985, 23). Instead, by paying lip service to gender hierarchies, just as Scott’s peasants do to the hierarchies of income and power, women are able to conceal their actual resistance. This structural analogy extends to women in whisper networks. Like the peasant resistance in Sedeka, the immediate aim of using a whisper network is survival, not revolution. As McKinney describes, “the network carries the worst nights of people’s lives...but it also carries warnings” (McKinney 2017). Such warnings include strategies to stymie sexual harassment, such as not showing up to meetings alone, inviting someone else to a lunch, and never staying late or getting drinks (Petersen 2017). While the continuous presence of whisper networks acknowledges harassment as a fact of life, it does not therefore accept such treatment as just or necessary. To the contrary, the role of whisper networks in resisting patriarchal power is particularly evident in gossip that transitions easily from discussions of harassers, to strategies of avoidance, to complaining about how difficult it is to do anything about men in such positions of consolidated power. Thus, as with the peasants Scott studied, whisper networks are made up of people who know the causes of their own oppression in that they do not merely seek protection against individual assailants, but also recognize the inadequacies of bureaucratic and institutional structures that are supposedly meant to protect them from harassment. In voicing a moral opposition to these structures and the behaviors they permit, whisper networks contest sexual harassment on a symbolic level and thereby coordinate actual resistance to its occurrence.

However, like the peasant resistance, the strategies of the whisper network are masked by symbolic conformity to patriarchal power. Such conformity is necessary because the barriers to overt resistance

are quite significant. To be sure, many women are currently making claims against figures such as Weinstein without facing terrible opposition. However, this is a very new phenomenon. Previous to this year, most women believed that “normal routes of protection — HR complaints, direct confrontation, the police — simply won’t work...and the price of becoming an accuser is so steep” (Petersen 2017). As I will argue, the price of accusing a powerful man of sexual harassment results from institutional cultures that protect and condone such acts. Whisper networks often were the only mechanisms women had to protect themselves and to oppose the acts they considered immoral. Yet because it is covert, a whisper network does not significantly destabilize structures of power. In fact, many of the activists in the #MeToo movement have criticized whisper networks for placing the burden on women to protect themselves from harassment, rather than on men in power to stop harassing women in their employ. Some activists allege that such networks accept “the status quo, in which women work around abusers rather than forcing them out of our workplaces” (Press 2017). For instance, a recent publication on “indecent advances” in academia includes a set of “prevention tips” including to “find out if there are rumors of sexual harassers in your field,” and, in the case that a researcher does experience harassment, to “confide in a trusted colleague or friend and discuss the pros and cons of filing a report” (Gewin 2015). In other words, this report recommends that young researchers turn to the whisper network before the institutional structures supposedly meant to protect them. However, by prioritizing the safety of individual women, the network leaves a culture of sexual harassment unchallenged. Therefore, like peasant resistance, it does not directly challenge gender hierarchies.

Nonetheless, as Matthew Gutmann argues in *Rituals of Resistance*, covert and overt resistance are not mutually exclusive responses to oppression. Gutmann claims that Scott’s description of peasant resistance is unsatisfying because the peasants ultimately accept society as it is, and that Scott’s argument comes at the cost of acknowledging the importance of overt resistance. For instance, Gutmann attributes to Scott the claim that peasants “[accept] society as it is — its inevitability if not its justice” (Gutmann 1993, 75). This is an unfair criticism, because Scott does state that “the notion of inevitability itself can be, and is, negated by the historical practice of subordinate classes,” not to mention the ways that resistance challenges the justice of the status quo (Scott 1985, 23). The peasants Scott describes, indeed, might happily participate in a revolution were the possibilities more amiable. Rather, Scott’s argument rests on the empirical claim that in many cases, everyday resistance “has been the only option” (Scott 1985, 23). Yet while Gutmann’s criticism of Scott is ultimately off-target, his more important and helpful claim is that covert and overt resistance are two responses to conditions of oppression and may occur simultaneously: “it is not a question of overt of covert in isolation; rather...these forms occur together, alternate, and transform themselves into each other” (Gutmann 1993, 75). Gutmann does not offer a clear framework for understanding how covert and overt resistance are transformed one into the other, but the emergence of the #MeToo movement is an excellent example of how covert resistance can generate overt opposition.

Whisper networks laid the groundwork for resistance by maintaining a moral community with a set of values in opposition to sexual harassment, but the #MeToo movement is transforming this moral orientation into overt resistance. As one journalist and

#MeToo activist wrote, “this is the year the whisper network went viral” (Meza 2017). With the #MeToo movement, information that had long circulated in whisper networks is becoming public knowledge shared far beyond small moral communities. Concurrently, the moral judgments and values implicit in whisper networks are also being explicitly voiced. Complaints about how easily men in power can abuse women have generated public allegations and calls for those men to relinquish their power. The tensions between the movement and the status quo reflect the revolutionary tendencies of the whisper networks themselves. For instance, in order to justify their inattention to sexual harassment, institutions must assert that sexual harassment is highly uncommon. In direct contradiction, however, the very underlying principle of the whisper network is that sexual harassment so frequent, it is a fact of life that drives women to formulate specific coping strategies. #MeToo has sought to expose that by revealing publicly how many people within these industries have experienced sexual harassment and how many people in positions of power are harassers.

The shift from a local whisper network has also raised new challenges, as #MeToo activists seek to realize their values in new public institutions. Significantly, claims within the whisper network are typically assessed and passed along based on reputational politics within a local community. No evidence is required apart from a narrative that is believable given the purported assailant’s character. The aim of passing along such information, moreover, is self-protective rather than a direct attempt at character assassination. These ends are maintained in the #MeToo movement, but come into significant tension with a media establishment that airs claims on a broad scale, and a justice system that typically operates on the basis of “innocent until proven guilty”. To some extent, the typical function of a whisper network is replicated when whole groups of women (and in some cases, men) come forward to affirm each other’s accusations. However, most of the perpetrators named have been forced out or stepped down without due process, raising red flags in some quarters about the possibility of false accusations and the miscarriage of justice (Yoffe 2017). A particularly telling example was one woman’s attempt to institutionalize and democratize the whisper network in the New York media industry by sharing a spreadsheet online that anyone could anonymously edit to add the names and deeds of “shitty media men”. The document was removed within a few days, but not before accumulating 74 names (Chapin 2017). Even #MeToo advocates, such as journalist Alex Press, have expressed concerns about the possibility of false claims gaining steam in such a format: “while false reporting is far from common, the ability to input an allegation anonymously and online runs the risk of declaring men guilty without verification” (Press 2017). Press invokes the possible reputational costs of gossip when it occurs in a typical whisper network, which prevents people from making false accusations, and keeps unbelievable ones from further propagating. In the spreadsheet, unlike in the whisper network, a gossipier did not have to stake their reputation on the received validity of their complaint. As a result, most journalists writing about the list noted one or two claims which they were certain would not be substantiated (Tolentino 2017). These tensions reflect the differences between covert and overt resistance. They also demonstrate the schism between the primary moral orientation of whisper networks — that sexual harassment is wrong — and the powerful institutions that do not fully accept this value. Thus, #MeToo activists draw on whisper networks to rethink the polity, even if they have not yet

presented an explicit and coherent alternative.

In fact, while many institutional structures overtly agree that sexual harassment is wrong, whisper networks at work reveal this to be a mask. As Lila Abu-Lughod argues, everyday resistance can serve as a diagnostic for often covert or complex functions of power. Scott’s work, she argues, manifests a widely-shared tendency to romanticize resistance, and to “read all resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42). In other words, we tend to look at resistance as evidence that apparently hegemonic power structures can never truly dominate us, and that humans have a certain indomitable agency even in deeply oppressive conditions. However, this romantic notion inaccurately disconnects resistance from power, when in fact it typically operates from an opposing field of power. Therefore, she argues, “we should use resistance as a diagnostic of power” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42). Among the Bedouin, for instance, Abu-Lughod documents that women’s resistance to patriarchal power takes many of the forms Scott describes: they tell sexually irreverent jokes, songs, and folktales; they keep secrets for each other; and they tell elaborate stories of those who have resisted pressure to marry. In other words, they gossip. In each of these instances, however, women’s resistance to patriarchal power is actually grounded in those forms native to the society itself. For example, the folktales and songs express Bedouin values of resistance to power; and the strict segregation of women’s and men’s spaces make it easy for women to gossip and keep secrets together. Therefore, Abu-Lughod writes, “women take advantage of [the] contradictions in their society to assert themselves and to resist...through locally given traditional forms, a fact which suggests that in some sense at least, these forms have been produced by power relations and cannot be seen as independent of them” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42). On some level, then, women’s resistance is also a product of gender hierarchy itself. It both opposes dominating power structures and uses them for its own ends. Abu-Lughod takes her argument too far when she argues that this means that young Bedouin “unwittingly [enmesh] themselves in an extraordinarily complex set of new power relations” (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42). She does not present compelling evidence for this false-consciousness argument. It is not clear that this choice is unwitting; and in fact, the very act of resistance suggests that Bedouin women are aware of the power structures in which they are enmeshed. Nevertheless, Abu-Lughod’s argument that resistance both opposes and is rooted in power reflects the relation between whisper networks and gender hierarchy.

The Open Secret of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a culturally intimate practice that combines tacit acceptance with official disavowal, a contradiction that provides some power to whisper networks. As defined by Michael Herzfeld in his seminal text, *Cultural Intimacy*, “cultural intimacy is the recognition of those aspects of an officially shared identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld 2016, 7). The culturally intimate is notoriously difficult for outsiders to identify, as it contains those aspects of a culture that everyone within the community knows about, but conceals from outsiders. Such concealment is necessary when the culturally intimate practice contradicts official political cultures. As a result,

representatives of the community disavow such acts and claim that they never happen anymore. At the same time, however, a wide network of collusion, extending to bureaucracies and political structures that either participate or look the other way, maintains culturally intimate practices. As Herzfeld explains, culturally intimate acts constitute “the tolerance of democratic state systems for various minor offenses against formal law and morality” (Herzfeld 2016, 7). Such acts violate both formal and moral laws, but are knowingly upheld by members of a community. They generate a sense of “embarrassment, rueful self-recognition....not solely personal feelings, but...the collective representation of intimacy” (Herzfeld 2016, 11). In other words, members of a group represent their shared secrets by performing culturally intimate behaviors when outsiders are absent or unable to recognize what is happening. A culturally intimate “open secret” differs from the covert resistance because it is a source of embarrassment and pride, rather than moral sanction. While the prime examples of cultural intimacy occur on the level of the nation-state, others occur on the level of an institution; as Herzfeld writes in *Cultural Intimacy*, “all institutional structures are capable of generating their own peculiar intimacies” (Herzfeld 2016, 54). Within most American institutions, and the country more broadly, one of the most culturally intimate acts is sexual harassment. This covert power marks a critical departure from Scott’s thesis, which expects power to express itself freely (Scott 1985, 23). To the contrary, covert resistance may oppose covert power. At the same time, as with the Bedouin, whisper networks ground the key principle of their resistance – that sexual harassment is, indeed, bad – in the politically correct culture that many harassers publicly endorse but secretly undermine.

As with most culturally intimate elements, sexual harassment was once widely accepted. As Herzfeld writes, cultural intimacy is “highly labile. It shifts with the ideological winds of history” (Herzfeld 2016, 62). For example, many countries that once proudly embraced patriarchal models now find those models to be embarrassing in the context of a gender-egalitarian political consensus. Yet patriarchal behaviors, including harassment, remains a source of identification and rueful pride for “at least the male segment of these countries’ populations” (Herzfeld 2016, 62). Although women have sometimes been implicated in covering up for harassers, the vast majority of cases involve men harassing women, meaning that the culture of sexual harassment is primarily intimate to the men of a community (Pina, Gannon, and Saunders 2009, 128). Indeed, it was not long ago that relationships between men in power and their female employees or students were widely accepted. In Hollywood, the long myth (and reality) of the “Casting Couch,” where women would be asked to exchange sexual favors for roles, reflects the widespread acceptance of sexual harassment. As a 1956 exposé in *Picturegoer* described, “the terrible thing is that these facts seem to be taken for granted by people in show business” (Dessem 2017). In the context of academia, sexual relationships between professors and students were also widely accepted until recently. For example, a 1993 panel on whether such relationships should be prohibited unanimously agreed against the prohibition, with English Professor William Kerrigan from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst reasoning that he sometimes met “a female student who, for one reason or another has unnaturally prolonged her virginity... There have been times when this virginity has been presented to me as something that I... can handle” (Mcmillen 2017). Sexual harassment was not so much an open secret, as not a secret at all.

Such widely practiced behaviors were not seen as morally wrong and likely would not have been termed harassment. Over time and for reasons beyond the scope of this paper, the political culture has shifted to condemn sexual harassment, making it a secret but one widely shared by most men in the institution.

As a result, the cultural intimacy surrounding sexual harassment both accounts for the extent of this “open secret” and provides the basis for women’s resistance in the whisper network. The abuses of most of the men named in the #MeToo movement, including Weinstein, were “open secrets” facilitated by a wide network of collusion. Many of Weinstein’s staff and company reported knowing about his behavior and sometimes being enlisted in facilitating his encounters with young actresses (Farrow 2017). Seth MacFarlane even made a joke about the sexual price of entry to the film industry at the Oscars in 2013, telling the five nominees for best supporting actress, “congratulations! You five ladies no longer need to pretend to be attracted to Harvey Weinstein” (Mason 2017). It would be incorrect to interpret these colluders as either bad eggs or pathetic assistants sucked into the dirty schemes of their bad-egg bosses. Within Hollywood, as within many other institutions, sexual harassment is widely and implicitly accepted even while it is publicly disavowed (Stephens 2017). Moreover, bureaucratic structures technically intended to prevent sexual harassment, from the Screen Actor’s Guild (the union for actors), to university Title IX offices responsible for implementing sexual and gender-based harassment policies, to large companies’ human resources departments, often simply look away from such acts. Most are set up to prevent sexual harassment allegations from being heard outside the institution. For instance, the Screen Actor’s Guild responds to sexual harassment allegations by asking the production house or studio to conduct an internal investigation, creating a rich space for bureaucratic collusion – especially as harassers often run or own the houses (Kirshner 2017). Human resources departments typically silence allegations in order to protect companies (Smith 2017). At universities, policies that make all employees mandatory reporters, who are legally responsible for passing along claims of sexual harassment, actively undermine whisper networks and make it much less likely that students will report their experiences (Flaherty 2015). There are limits to such collusion, but as the saying goes, “everyone knows” what goes on behind all the declarations of adherence to official political morality. As a result, while representatives of institutions claim that sexual harassment hardly happens, statistics suggest otherwise. For instance, recent surveys indicate that nearly two-thirds of women working in academic research at remote field sites experience sexual harassment, while one-fifth experience assault (Gewin 2015). A 2009 survey of the United States found that nearly half of women experienced sexual harassment at work, with higher levels among women of color, suggesting an intersection between the cultural intimate acts of racism and sexism (Rospenda, Richman, and Shannon 2009). In Hollywood, 94% of women reported experiences of harassment (Puente and Kelly 2018). Such widespread harassment reveals a culturally intimate practice that is rarely challenged by the structures of institutions, or by their members.

Currently, the cultural intimacy of sexual harassment appears to be confronted from two directions: the #MeToo movement, that confronts it, and a new populism that embraces it. As Herzfeld argues, “cultural intimacy, though associated with secrecy and embarrassment, may erupt into public life and collective self-representation”

(Herzfeld 2016, 7). Populist politicians are particularly skilled at channeling and legitimizing the content of cultural intimacy in order to build a political movement by transforming “potentially offensive speech, mannerisms, and attitudes” into “legitimate alternatives to establishment values and practices” (Herzfeld, manuscript under review (2018), p. 1, cited with permission). Such performances “draw on a repertoire of culturally intimate secrets,” including prejudices and vulgarity, which had previously been met with embarrassment but are mimicked and brought into the open by populist leaders (Herzfeld, 2018, p. 2). Populism is attractive because it allows people to escape embarrassment for the attitudes and practices they already espouse. Populist leaders may not openly espouse these embarrassing attitudes, themselves, but could also engage in specific performative acts that demonstrate their membership in the intimate space, particularly working-class styles of speech an action; they may also insist “I’m not sexist, but...” or “accidentally” fail to respond to particular incidents. From the release of the Access Hollywood tape and perhaps even before then, it was clear that President Trump participates in the culturally intimacy that tacitly approves of sexual harassment. However, he has never explicitly condoned sexual harassment and would insist that he did not mean his comments and has not ever been an abuser. Rather, he performs his populism through culturally intimate styles of speech, such as assigning women numbers on the basis of their attractiveness. His cynical deployment of a culture of sexual harassment is particularly evident in his choices to condemn politicians of the opposite party such as Bill Clinton who have been accused of such acts, but stand firmly behind similarly-situated members of his own party including Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, who has been accused of pedophilic acts. As Herzfeld discusses in the context of racism, populist leaders like Trump do not make give people these attitudes freshly made, but rather have “rendered them acceptable” (Herzfeld, 2018, p. 7). Trump has merely made acceptable certain behaviors and attitudes towards women that were already widespread in the American male. With dismissive descriptions of sexual harassment as “locker-room talk” and “boy talk,” Trump has transformed the shameful into the quotidian (Fitzgerald 2017, 485). He has turned a covert operation of power into one that is overt.

Conclusion: A New Confrontation

Whisper networks, long-standing forms of women’s resistance to regular sexual harassment within institutions, have recently generated a new overt resistance in the form of the #MeToo movement. Whisper networks had functioned in the space provided by the contradictions of male power, which simultaneously condemned and condoned sexual harassment. Yet in the same historical moment, a new populist leader has validated sexual harassment, and women have begun to vocally argue their opposition to such treatment. More research is needed to understand the relationship between these occurrences. Nevertheless, it is clear that #MeToo results from larger trends than just the Weinstein case. Weinstein’s much publicized crimes, while repellent, are not unique and therefore no more than the proximate catalyst. On the other hand, the rise of populist acceptance of sexual harassment under President Trump is a new phenomenon that could have triggered #MeToo. Whisper networks constituted a covert opposition to a covert function of power. When the covert power transformed into overt and public affirmations of sexism and sexual harassment, however, it began

to seem that the key space for women’s resistance – the political acceptance that sexual harassment meets a particular moral valence – was crumbling. This forced a covert whisper network to generate an overt form of resistance, as well. In other words, the battle over sexual harassment has come somewhat into the open. As a result, previously inchoate opposition to sexual harassment is becoming increasingly legible as whisper networks become public. #MeToo activists are developing a more tangible vision of the polity, with specific understandings about how sexual harassment allegations are assessed, what exactly constitutes sexual harassment, what sanctions are appropriate, and how gender hierarchies should operate more broadly. Thus, two alternate visions of the polity – Trump’s brand of populism and the #MeToo movement – are transitioning from hidden into open conflict. What will happen next is an empirical question that will certainly provide rich insights into the relationship of power and resistance, and the possibilities for social transformation.

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Gang Poetics: Writing Against the Criminalization of the Salvadoran Diaspora

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This article seeks to outline the way that the Salvadoran gang Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13, was used as a rhetorical device by politicians to criminalize the broader Salvadoran diaspora in the United States in the mid-2010s. I argue that as the legal definition of a “criminal” was expanded, primarily through 1996 immigration reform, immigrants who posed no threat to public safety were detained and deported because they were associated to the actions of MS-13 through speeches given during the Obama and Trump presidencies. It concludes by arguing that Salvadoran-American poet, Yesika Salgado, writes against this criminalization by re-appropriating the image of the machete, an image frequently associated with MS-13. Looking at contemporary Salvadoran-American poetry then becomes a way of contra-dicting misleading, dominant political rhetoric about the Salvadoran diaspora.

Introduction

At his first State of the Union address, President Donald Trump beckoned to the parents of two girls murdered by members of the Salvadoran gang, MS-13 or la Mara Salvatrucha. The four adults were shown on national television in tears as the President spoke about their daughters and claimed that the young men who’d murdered them had been in the United States precisely because of the country’s immigration system. Against the backdrop of their tears, Trump called on Congress to increase a border wall and provide funding for Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. In 2017, in the same Long Island neighborhood where the two daughters Trump spoke of were murdered, ICE detained at least 32 teenagers on the assumption of affiliation with MS-13. Months later, after the teenagers had been taken to detention centers states away from their homes, 14 were released when a judge ruled that the federal government did not have adequate evidence to prove their affiliation. The link between immigrant policing and MS-13 in Long Island was not as straight-forward as Trump’s State of the Union portrayed it.

This paper attempts to track the way that MS-13 grew as a result of U.S. policies, including immigration reform passed in 1996 that sought to increase national security. The expanded definition of an “aggravated felony” was central to the criminalization of a broad array of Salvadoran immigrants who were detained and deported for offenses, unlike those of MS-13, that did not pose a serious national security threat. Through a close reading of speeches given by Presidents Obama and Trump, I will argue that, since at least 2008, MS-13’s actions have been conflated with those of the undocumented Salvadoran diaspora at large to justify an expansion of immigrant policing and deportation policies. Finally, a literary analysis of Salvadoran-American poet Yesika Salgado’s debut collection, “Corazón,” reveals that Salvadoran diasporic authors contra-dict these discourses. Salgado does this by centering the domesticity of the majority of Salvadoran immigrant communities, specifically through reframing the image of the machete in a positive light.

The Salvadoran Civil War and Undocumented Immigration

Salvadoran immigrants have been coming to the United States since as early as the nineteenth century, often working for

transnational companies or providing desperately needed labor in the United States. Salvadoran immigration escalated during The Salvadoran Civil War which lasted from 1980 to 1992. The war and its aftermath led to the massive displacement of nearly three million Salvadorans (Rodriguez, 2009), the majority of whom resettled in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, the 2.1 million Salvadorans living in the United States in 2015 made up the third largest Latino ethnic group in the country (Antonio et al., 2017).

In the 1980s, many Salvadorans fled the country to avoid political violence. The United States provided the repressive, authoritarian Salvadoran government with over 4 billion dollars throughout the 80s, even as the military government oversaw a multitude of human rights violations (Bourgois, 2001). A statistical survey from 1984 found that Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) apprehensions soared in 1983 and 1984 when military sweep operations became “larger and more frequent” and that “fear of political violence appears to be the dominant motive for Salvadoran migration” (Stanley, 1984).

Though the link seemed clear, the United States government at the time did not acknowledge the immigrants as refugees. Salvadoran migrants qualified for refugee status under the United Nations 1951 Convention and the US Refugee Act of 1980, but the United States’ political and financial support for the Salvadoran government prevented the U.S. government from legally granting the distinction (Abrego, 2017). Fewer than 3 percent of Salvadorans who applied for political asylum in the 1980s were accepted. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) only offered a path to citizenship to immigrants who migrated to the United States before January 1st, 1982, which covered only a portion of Salvadoran immigrants given that cutoff was only two years into the war (Abrego, 2014).

This forced many Salvadorans to live in the United States as undocumented immigrants and made a large portion of the Salvadoran diaspora susceptible to restrictive U.S. immigration policy. The lack of legal status prevented undocumented Salvadoran immigrants from being able to “plan toward a stable future” (Abrego, 2017). An inability to work legally led most Salvadoran immigrants to live in “poor urban centers with high levels of racial and ethnic tensions” and to be “disproportionately employed in service, manufacturing, and construction industries characterized by instability