Special Issue: The Geographies of Star Trek
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There are relatively few media products that can compete with Star Trek in terms of longevity and cultural saturation. First introduced to audiences in 1966, the franchise now encompasses more than fifty years, six television series, thirteen films, countless spin-off novels and ancillary books, multiple annual international fan conventions and an enduring place in the popular culture lexicon of the English language—a remarkable feat for a television show that almost never made it to the screen and, even when it did, was canceled for poor ratings after just three seasons.

San Francisco served as both the site of the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers and the fictional headquarters and charter site of Star Trek’s United Federation of Planets and Starfleet Headquarters. During the 2016 AAG meeting, geographers continued to expand the Society’s exploration of the integration of popular culture and geographical understanding. Star Trek can and has been utilized in many instances as a reflection of broader geographical problems, concepts, and trends, but there are also geographical implications of Star Trek and the spatial and philosophical impacts of the franchise’s broad reach. This special issue originated from a panel session which delved into these geographical concerns; the papers contained here reflect the breadth of knowledge of the contributors. The authors not only have an intimate knowledge of Star Trek, but apply that knowledge to their expertise in historical, cultural, political, and environmental geographies and an even wider breadth of theoretical perspectives. This special issue presents the possibilities of popular culture to be studied geographically and how popular culture, and Star Trek in particular, has itself had a significant impact upon geographical processes.

**STAR TREK**

Initially conceived by Gene Roddenberry, an L.A. policeman-turned-screenwriter, Star Trek was imagined as a weekly adventure
morality tale, a “wagon train to the stars” or “Horatio Hornblower in space” (Gerrold, 1984). The show was anticipated to provide both excitement and social commentary in the context of a human future that was both more optimistic and more egalitarian than the US of the 1960s (Roddenberry 1964). However, the first pilot episode, The Cage, was dismissed by studio executives as too progressive (a female first officer), too alien (a science officer with “devil ears”) and too cerebral (a captain conflicted about his mission) for mainstream television (Gerrold 1984). Nevertheless, the studio liked the concept and, in an unusual step, asked for a second pilot. With a new captain and the removal of the female first officer, the executives at NBC studios were presented with the much more action-oriented Where No Man Has Gone Before and, with some encouragement from Lucille Ball and Desilu Studios, the show was finally commissioned for the fall of 1966 (Gerrold, 1984).

Premiering in the middle of Lyndon Johnson’s escalation of US involvement in the Vietnam War, the show provided audiences with a weekly escape to a future in which humanity had survived the tumultuous years of the mid-twentieth century and had emerged morally and technologically improved. The future was utopian, a place where, on Earth at least, hunger, poverty, racism, violence, and war had all been relegated to the past, and took place in a universe in which we coexisted peacefully not only with other humans, but with a host of alien species who, in their various ways, contributed to a vision of an inclusive, progressive, altruistic society. Roddenberry himself is very clear that it is the turmoil, both political and social, of the 1960s that provided the impetus for his vision (Alexander 1994). In his very thinly sketched backstory for the Star Trek universe, it is the war and devastation of the late-twentieth to mid-twenty-first centuries that encourages the unification of the human population as the United Earth Federation. Only after overcoming these conflicts and banding together as a united human popula-

tion can the future be realized and humans, in concert with other “intellectually and technologically advanced species,” to wit the Vulcans, can embark on Roddenberry’s space-borne adventure (Alexander 1994). Critically, however, it was also a future ruled by the “universal ideals” of western liberalism – democracy, inclusivity, individualism and generosity – that are utilized to create an overarching benevolent hegemony. This hegemony is represented in a number of ways. It is personified in characters such as Captain James T. Kirk or in the larger organizations found within Star Trek, such as the multi-species, yet disproportionately human, United Federation of Planets and their scientific and military academy, Star Fleet. These quasi-militaristic characterizations and characters of the Federation have a duty to expand their “harmonious” hegemony to the rest of the universe.

Despite its optimistic vision, the show fared poorly in the weekly ratings and, unloved by the NBC studio executives who frequently interfered in script and story decisions, it was relegated in its third, and final, season to a late Friday night timeslot. However, only a few months after its cancelation in spring of 1969 the show was sold into syndication and by fall 1969 was showing in over 150 television markets across the US. Star Trek quickly became one of the most popular syndicated shows on television and, within a few years, generated a new animated series, a growing number of novelizations and spin-off novels, and the first Star Trek Convention in New York in January 1972. In the face of the unprecedented popularity of the series once it was released into syndication, Paramount Studios acceded to fans’ demands for first one, and then, despite the lack of financial and critical success of Star Trek: The Motion Picture (1979), a series of twelve more films over a thirty-seven-year period, with a fourteenth scheduled for 2019. In terms of popular culture impact however, it is the four spin-off series, totaling an additional 624 episodes, that have brought Star Trek into the daily lives of television viewers, not just
in the US, or even in the English-speaking world, but across the globe (Gerrold 1984).

By the late 1970s, Star Trek: The Original Series (TOS) was syndicated in more than 60 overseas television markets, and each of the subsequent series have achieved similar levels of international appeal. At the height of the Star Trek phenomenon, three separate series were being filmed simultaneously. Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG), set aboard a larger and more advanced starship Enterprise nearly a century after TOS, ran for seven seasons from 1987-1994. Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (DS9) has been the only series not set aboard a starship, but rather a space station. DS9 was set during the same time as TNG and also ran for seven seasons from 1992-1999. Also set during the same time, only in a separate quadrant of the galaxy from the rest of the franchise, Star Trek: Voyager ran from 1995-2001. The most recent series, Star Trek: Enterprise, mirrors TNG by being set over a century before TOS and on an earlier version of the starship Enterprise. This latest series ran for four seasons from 2001-2005.

As of July 2016, Netflix was airing all five existing Star Trek series in 188 countries, in thirty different languages (Knapp 2016), and the international receipts of all thirteen films had substantially outpaced the domestic box office (The Numbers 2017). The newest series, Star Trek: Discovery, is scheduled to begin airing in July, 2017.

The influence of this huge presence in the canon of popular culture is hard to overstate. Star Trek in all its incarnations, has provided a vision of American values that has contributed to a global normalization of the “benevolent hegemony” of western liberalism. Even the ancillary material – books, magazines and on-line encyclopedias such as Memory Alpha and Memory Beta – that have been developed by fans to support and extend the official canon, serve to more closely interconnect Star Trek with the American liberal values of the Kennedy era and beyond (Memory Alpha 2017, Memory Beta 2017). While minutiae like the Articles of Federation are not explicated in the actual on-screen universe, the fact that it was possible as early as 1975 for fans to create such a document, largely by conflating the material aired in the original series with the UN Charter, indicates just how thoroughly embedded western/liberal idealism was in the text and subtext of the programming (Franz 1975).

While geographic ideas and processes have been embedded within Star Trek from the start, the reverse cannot be said. This special issue greatly expands upon and lays a foundation for geographical engagement with Star Trek and its many geopolitical, historical, and cultural resonances. Few geographers have addressed the Star Trek universe. Dittmer and Dodds’s (2008) work on fandom and audience studies drew heavily from Star Trek in arguing for more deliberate and disparate theoretical analyses of popular geopolitics, something this special issue deliberately achieves. Dittmer also used Star Trek as an example of popular culture and science fiction that is very much real, experienced, embodied, and full of agency (Dittmer 2010). Finally, Mair (2009) explored the reality of Star Trek from a materialized perspective: the town of Vulcan, Alberta attempted to capitalize on their name by selling themselves as a tourist destination, a process that both changed their landscape and challenged their identity. This relatively small literature reveals the extent to which a fully-engaged discussion on the geographies of Star Trek is necessary.

“Mindscapes” (Slusser and Rabkin 1989) and “fictive geographies” (Sharp 2000) also present a foundation for work in popular culture. The former delves into the idea of illusionary landscapes that are simultaneously imagined and real. These mindscapes form from our imaginations and from sources such as science fiction, but, as this special issue illuminates, they draw on real-world narratives and have impacts on our actions, the way we interact with “Others,” how we perceive and engage with geopolitics, and how we understand ourselves. Sharp (2000, 333) stressed the importance of analyzing fiction from multiple perspectives, keeping
in mind that both the original voice of the narrative, as well as the perception of the narrative by audiences, are part of dynamic social processes.

**GEOPOLITICS AND STAR TREK**

To embark on a geographical analysis of *Star Trek* requires first a discussion of foundational geopolitics and to present an historical synopsis of its development in geographic intellectual discourse. Geopolitics refers to the study of the perception of politics as influenced by geographical factors (particularly when applied to international relations), and examines the use of spatial awareness in comprehending and managing relations between groups of people (O’Sullivan 1986). Merging political forces with geographical awareness has long been intertwined with the discipline of geography, particularly in the discipline’s earliest forays in exploration and colonialism. Three lines of discourse guided early geopolitical understandings—geostrategy, environmental determinism, and social Darwinism (Dixon 2015). These early understandings have been heavily critiqued more recently by scholars operating within critical, feminist, and popular geopolitical frameworks, who consider deeper social, economic, and cultural factors influencing politics (Haverluk et al. 2014; Dixon 2015).

In knowing that geopolitics constitutes political awareness with spatial context, popular geopolitics, then, can be defined as the “process by which geopolitical ideas are produced and reproduced through popular culture” (Haverluk, Beauchemin, and Mueller 2014, 20). Haverluk et al. go on to explain that while many geopolitical hegemonies derive from foreign policy committees, military “think tanks,” and academics, popular culture also serves to expand and challenge the geopolitical views of a wide audience. Some scholars even suggest that popular geopolitics can effectively be studied in conjunction with audience studies, in order to gauge “audience reception towards media representations of geopolitical affairs” (Woon 2014, 660).

Popular culture is, in itself, geopolitical. Dittmer (2010) defines popular geopolitics as a particular subset of political geography in which the daily-lived experience of geopolitics is the subject matter of interest, citing publicly-distributed propaganda as one of the many examples of the connections between geopolitics and the media. This propaganda can manifest as “news stories that are purportedly ‘slanted’ against another government, or a film in which the villain is a particular nationality, or just a song that inspires martial feelings at a critical moment in diplomatic relations” (Dittmer 2010, 14). Popular geopolitics, then, is a culmination of the many ideas, tangible items, and experiences that constitute the everyday geographies of an individual, studied through a lens of popular culture. It must be noted, however, that some scholars contest geopolitics, particularly popular geopolitics, as being true reflections of the everyday experience (Pain and Smith 2008), due to how political and media-driven forces can produce certain fears and expectations. Popular geopolitics influence who we, as consumers of media, fear and respect, what areas of the world we associate with violence, peace, fear, and safety, and whether we accept or reject societal norms. Simply put, “everyday accounts tend to suggest it is the same old longstanding local fears which are most prominent in people’s lives, rather than fears about terrorism or new killer viruses: the new ‘global’ fears simply do not figure that highly in everyday lives…” (5). Therefore, popular geopolitics can be seen as mirror reflections of what a society deems important in their everyday, not what is always actually important in the everyday. It is through this revelation that scale becomes important: to understand geopolitical tensions in a geographic area, microscale geopolitics of the everyday must be considered in the broader context of global geopolitics.

Several examples in the literature offer case studies of the connections between popular culture and geopolitics. Adare (2005) demonstrated the discriminatory and problematic manner in which American Indians have
been portrayed in science fiction television, particularly in older episodes of science fiction programs such as *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* that stereotyped indigenous individuals as “backward,” “simple-minded,” and “folksy.” Stereotypes of race have also often been followed by stereotypes of geographic regions in which the race is concentrated, affecting imagined geopolitical boundaries.

Literature in popular geopolitics has often focused on several themes, including the power of news media, comic books and superheroes, film and television, the natural environment, war, terrorism, and oral histories. There are strong interconnections between these themes, particularly when considering news media coverage of the natural environment, war, and terrorism. The discourse surrounding these themes is heavily shaped by various news media outlets. In some cases, this discourse can be influenced by humor, such as in the use of Achmed the Dead Terrorist in popular culture (Purcell et al. 2009). Popular geopolitics in American comic books have always been significant, which is logical considering an anti-comic book environment following World War II, following a period of widespread censorship in America, where any “oppositional voices and deviant culture” was deemed a threat (Lopes 2009, 37). Literature also draws in the significance of news media, which affect how people view cultural artifacts such as comic books. These viewpoints are often shaped and influenced by news media, and socially and culturally reproduced by oral communication.

A focus on popular geopolitics differs from and advances the traditional study of geopolitics, in that geopolitics tend to focus on major political figures and how they influence decision-making involving borders, war, and natural resource allocation. While these analyses are important in understanding the powerful groups who control discourse behind much of the global political environment, popular geopolitics puts the power back into the hands of the individual. Studies in popular geopolitics are concerned with how each individual viewer perceives popular culture as it relates to perceptions of local, regional, and global conflict. This is not to say that the global political actors are not important in critical popular geopolitical studies, but understanding individual responses to popular media are just as important as the motivations of the global actors.

**CONNECTING STAR TREK AND GEOGRAPHY**

**History and the Future**

Since *Star Trek* is a futuristic narrative, one approach for geographers is to examine the narratives of the storylines as possible and alternative futures. The articles by Rhodes and Davidson both engage with the idea of the future, but from two unique perspectives. Davidson utilizes a geopolitical lens to understand the relationships between the United States’ past and continuing violent ideologies in the fictional future. Likewise, Rhodes borrows more historical perspectives of understanding memory and landscape, in conjunction with theories from the field of futures studies, to reveal the futuristic, yet backward-looking, perspectives and engagements in select examples from the franchise. In these cases, and throughout the issue, the role of time and historical context is paramount. As mentioned already and elaborated at length in Davidson’s article nothing in Star Trek happened in a vacuum. Whether the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, or our ongoing contentious presence in the Middle East, geopolitical and social events have influenced the futuristic *Star Trek*, yet, in-turn, the franchise significantly influenced audience perception of the past, present, and future.

**Affect and the Other**

Engagement by audiences with the “other” and our ability to empathize is a second clear theme throughout the special issue, but particularly in the Seitz, Gunderman, and Barber articles. Each relates *Star Trek* to the “other”
through unique perspectives. Gunderman, for instance, directly engages with empathy for the antagonist, connecting it back to science fiction’s ability to realign audience perspectives and empathize with and understand multiple perspectives off-screen, as well. Barber, too, addresses othering, yet using the framework of the anthropological machine and *Star Trek’s* role in defining what it means to be human. Gunderman, meanwhile, focuses on the ability for the franchise to bridge differences and impart empathy for the other, while Barber clearly dissects *Star Trek’s* trend of racializing and demonizing the other to greater bolster the nativism of human superiority. Seitz uses a similar approach, focusing particularly on the role of the United States, specifically the president, and the connections between the various shows’ captains, the United Federation of Planets, the United States, and the President. Using a combination of emotional and popular geopolitical lenses, Seitz applies psychoanalysis of guilt and empathy to reveal the geopolitically connected clouded moral judgments of *Star Trek* and the United States government.

**Geographical Engagement**

Each article in this issue brings a unique perspective to the geographies of *Star Trek*. The authors engage with each of the five series, many of the films, and various other manifestations. As stated above, this issue lays a foundation for future work on *Star Trek*, and while the authors engage with a number of meaningful geographical concepts, there is much more to be done. Building upon the articles in this issue, and pressing onward with future research, opens the possibilities for geographical understanding and knowledge of popular culture’s impact on the earth and its many peoples, places, spaces, and landscapes.

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Introduction: The Geographies of Star Trek

Owning the Future:
Manifest Destiny and
the Vision of American
Hegemony in Star Trek

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ABSTRACT

As one of the most enduring television franchises of the late 20th century, Star Trek has had an unparalleled influence on the popular culture representation of humanity’s future as ultimately utopian. In this paper, however, I argue that even as the on-screen text of Star Trek was condemning the narrow parochial interests of nationalism, greed, xenophobia and fear, the narrative subtext throughout the fifty years of the franchise supported the idea of the expansion of western hegemonic power. The paper utilizes examples from all five series and the thirteen films to illustrate the ways in which western liberal ideas such as individualism, self-determination and economic integration are woven throughout the on-screen narrative. This sub-text of the superiority of western liberalism both mirrors the geopolitical realities of American power in the late 20th century and recapitulates the manifest destiny narrative of 19th century US western expansion.

Key Words: hegemony, liberalism, Star Trek, manifest destiny

INTRODUCTION

Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.

— Captain James T. Kirk
(Star Trek: The Original Series Prologue)

You understand what the Federation is, don’t you? It’s important. It’s a peacekeeping and humanitarian armada…

— Captain Christopher Pike
(Star Trek 2009)

Bookending the Star Trek canon, from the 1966 original TV series to the 2009 reboot movie series, these two quotes encapsulate the narrative subtext of this popular culture
phenomenon. From explicit expansionism to implicit moral superiority, Gene Roddenberry’s fictional universe provides a half century of subtle, and not-so-subtle, support for the idea of American hegemony. Famous for its utopian, upbeat vision of the future, the Star Trek universe of the 1960s depicted a futuristic Pax Americana, where the USS Enterprise is sent out to spread enlightenment in the dangerous conflict zones at the edges of the known universe, while the core of the Federation remains safe—safe not only from the threat of acknowledged enemies, such as the Klingons and Romulans, but also from the unknown, the strange, and the exotic, whose introductions to the Federation will be mediated through distance and the actions of these “expeditionary” forces who are tasked with making “first contacts.”

Fifty years later, the text of this narrative universe has changed dramatically. Threats are now existential, world-ending events like the destruction of entire planets. The core worlds of the Federation are repeatedly put at risk and the antagonists are no longer predictable state-surrogate rival empires, but are atomized individuals, non-state violent actors (NSVAs), and previously unknown hostile species, not encountered on the edges of Federation-controlled space, but striking directly at its heart. Yet, some of the basic assumptions of the Pax Americana remain in place: the Federation is the inclusive, altruistic, progressive umbrella organization that is under threat from irrational, aggressive, and often solitary external threats. In this way, the narrative moves from the moral certainties of a mid-20th century, bi-polar Cold War world to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainties of multi-polarity and its challenges in the early 21st century.

The overarching contention of this paper is that hegemony, specifically a hegemony of western liberal ideas (democracy, self-determination, individualism, free-market capitalism) provides a continual sub-textual theme throughout the five series and thirteen films of the Star Trek universe. Even as the overt text has shifted from utopian optimism to Hobbesian chaos, the fixed theme of expanding a benevolent hegemony underpins all of the main story arcs and provides tension in the narrative, where themes that play out in the text as self-conscious, progressive and critical are countered in a subtext that is often sub-conscious, conformist and unreflective.

HEGEMONY, IDEALISM AND REALISM: FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STAR TREK UNIVERSE.

Hegemony comes from a Greek verb meaning to dominate or lead, and the term was originally used as a way to describe relations between the Greek city-states. Modern usage of the term has diverged into two distinct, but often overlapping, theoretical constructs, cultural hegemony and the state-centered international relations discussion of power relationships (O’Sullivan 1986).

The concept of cultural hegemony originates in early Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, but is greatly expanded with Antonio Gramsci’s work on historical materialism and the maintenance of bourgeois control of society through what he calls “manufactured consent.” (Gramsci 1988). For Gramsci, the foundational tenets of capitalism and materialism are disseminated through society in such a way as to normalize the aspirations and behaviors of the elites and allow them to control the direction of cultural and economic change. Conceived as an intra-national process, the advent of post WWII globalization and post-Cold War saturation of international markets with the ideas, products and cultural values of western liberalism created a global stage for Gramsci’s manufactured consent, and its associated hegemonic power (Agnew 2005).

In orthodox realist international relations, hegemony denotes the existence within the international political system of a dominant state or group of states. The hegemon has a self-interest in the preservation of a stable military and economic system and is prepared to use military force to underwrite the security of the system as a whole. At the same
time, the hegemon benefits from the ability to formulate the rules that govern political, cultural and economic interactions within the international system (Bacevich 2003; Ferguson 2004).

From a geopolitical standpoint, the world has experienced a series of hegemonic powers over the last four centuries. But it is the post-WWII rise of global structures, in the form of trade agreements, super-state organizations, and the globalization of popular culture, that has created a new post-state form of hegemony. True hegemonic power is now in the hands of multi-national corporations and international financial institutions (Cox 1987). Post-WWII US hegemony created this structure, through the power of US corporations and the US government’s interest in maximizing their geographical influence through the exercise of military power (Harvey 2003). For much of the world this hegemony was realized through cooperation and consent; in Agnew’s conceptualization of hegemonic relationships, “...hegemony is the enrollment of others in the exercise of your power by convincing, cajoling, and coercing them that they should want what you want.” (Agnew 2005, 1-2). However, the 21st century has demonstrated that there are limits to such cooperation, and that there is a price to pay for creating a system in which the interests of those within the state, even the hegemonic state, have become secondary to the interest of the post-state hegemonic institutions (Agnew 2005).

In *Star Trek*, we see the application of this neo-hegemony, in which there is an overarching non-state-centered set of economic flows, power relationships and cultural tenets that inform the values promoted in the text of all the on-screen material through the benevolent hegemony of the Federation. Meanwhile, Federation rivals—the Klingons, the Romulans, the Ferengi, the Cardassians, the Borg—represent the antithesis of those ideals. The Federation is presented as the only arbiter of political, cultural, economic and social principles, and membership can only be extended to those who conform to the Articles of Federation as set out in the Charter of the United Federation of Planets which reinforces those principles (Franz 1975).

The Federation also represents, through Starfleet, the only legitimate wielder of violence in the territory that it claims and actively seeks to expand its social, cultural and economic control beyond its current boundaries. Expansion into spaces that are occupied by ciphers representing “non-Federation” values: aggression, imperialism, cultural domination, and rigidly hierarchical power structures. Within the territory, those values are propagated by an almost exclusively Human/Vulcan cultural elite, and they explicitly promote a socio-culturally liberal and economically free-market approach to the future. Roddenberry’s creation of Vulcans with their reliance on logic and intellectual rigor is particularly important in providing textual support for the merits of the Federation and its values. Conceptualized as a hyper-rational, intellectually and technologically advanced alien species, it is the Vulcans who first make contact with 21st century humans, and who shepherd humanity into space flight and space exploration. Governed by tenets of non-aggression, logic and tolerance, two Vulcan maxims *IDIC*, or *Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations* and “the good of the many outweighs the good of the few, or the one” become axiomatic in the Star Trek universe, and at times are used to subtly reinforce the hegemonic subtext. The very nature of their rational approach to the universe, and their participation in the Federation, gives credibility to the institution itself.

The ideals promoted in this *Star Trek* universe are assumed to be universal, and can be traced to many of the concepts underlying liberal idealism that came out of WWI. One idea in particular—that international relations could be mediated through the actions of individuals and cooperative institutions working together in a benevolent hegemony—underlies the *Star Trek* philosophy. These institutions organize the world into peaceful, prosperous states that behave in
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accordance with a set of rules that prohibit aggression and mandate mediated solutions to international disputes. This early-20th-century idealism embodies ideas of popular self-determination, democratic rule, uncontested sovereignty and international mediation of conflict and aggression. It is also an explicitly American set of principles, as McGeorge Bundy, United States National Security Agency adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, stated in 1962: “At the time of Woodrow Wilson it was the articulate major premise of our democracy, and the inarticulate major premise of our new diplomacy, that people are not so deeply different from one another. It followed that one could and should think of making the world safe for democracy by ways and means drawn directly from the American political tradition” (Bundy 1964).

By the 1960s, however, the hard power calculations of realism had come to dominate American foreign policy in the face of the complex international problems of the Cold War. States act to maximize their own interests; international cooperation is a side-show, and the rules of international engagement are set only by the most powerful state players. It is in the context of one facet of this international stand-off, deepening US involvement in the Vietnam War with growing dissent at home, that Gene Roddenberry developed his concept for Star Trek. The future, as envisioned by this ex-Army airman, turned LA policeman and screenwriter, will see the victory of altruism and cooperation, a victory that is self-consciously cast in the mold of mid-20th century western-liberal idealism (Alexander 1994).

In Roddenberry’s early conceptualization of Star Trek as a “wagon train to the stars” there is an implicit invitation to compare Starfleet’s mission to the history of European settlement in North America, with Captain Kirk and his crew as the new Lewis and Clark of their time. In this way, Roddenberry’s Federation reiterates and reifies manifest destiny and the civilizing mission of western expansionism for a new century.

THE ORIGINAL SERIES, THE COLD WAR AND VIETNAM

And that claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.

— John L. O’Sullivan (1845)

One of the virtues most often claimed for Roddenberry’s Star Trek: The Original Series (ST:TOS) is that, at a time of internal and external discord it was a consistent vision of a utopian future. In this future, all of humanity along with a substantial portion of the nearby Milky Way, is engaged in a project of peaceful exploration and cooperative trade and diplomacy. However, when ST:TOS is viewed through a geopolitical framework, it becomes evident that Roddenberry’s acknowledged vision of the future clearly falls in the early-20th-century mold of liberal idealism, with all of its assumptions of American moral and political superiority woven into the subtext of the narrative.

The textual admission that such external inference in less socially, economically and technologically advanced societies might be harmful is explicitly acknowledged through the plot device of the Prime Directive. The most important rule in the Starfleet manual, officially known as General Order One, the Prime Directive forbids Starfleet personnel from interfering with the internal development of alien civilizations. This conceptual law applies particularly to civilizations which are below a certain threshold of technological, scientific and cultural development, and prevents starship crews from using their superior technology to impose their own values or ideals on them and on several occasions captains of the Enterprise emphasize the importance of the directive:

A starship captain’s most solemn oath is that he will give his life, even his entire crew, rather than violate the Prime

The Prime Directive is not just a set of rules. It is a philosophy, and a very correct one. History has proved again and again that whenever mankind interferes with a less developed civilization, no matter how well intentioned that interference may be, the results are invariably disastrous. (Captain Jean Luc Picard, *Symbiosis* ST:TNG 1:22)

However, in practice, the Prime Directive is shown to be ignored more often than it is invoked (Gerrold 1984; Dyson 2015), undercutting its status as the most important of Starfleet’s regulations and sub-textually betraying the message that interference is damaging. For every mention of non-interference there are entire episodes predicated on the USS Enterprise and her crew altering the futures of non-aligned worlds and worlds that have not yet had inter-planetary contact. This is almost always done entirely uncritically and usually to impose those external values that the Federation holds dear. Any one of those episodes was designed to make an overt textual point, slavery is wrong, racism is wrong, exploitation is wrong, but taken together the cumulative subtext is that wherever local cultures or societies do not measure up to the values and ideals of the Federation, they can be altered at the whim of that organization’s representative, backed up, of course, by the military might of Starfleet (Gerrold 1984):

The Enterprise was a cosmic meddler. Her attitudes were those of twentieth century America – and so her mission was (seemingly) to spread *truth, justice and the American Way* to the far corners of the universe. Gerrold (1984; emphasis in original text)

Whether it was removing a totalitarian, culture-stabilizing computer (*Return of the Archons* ST:TOS 1:21) or destroying a garden of Eden provided by a god for his servants (*The Apple* ST:TOS 2:5); teaching ruling groups that treating others as subordinates was oppression (*The Gamesters of Triskelion* ST:TOS 2:16, *Bread and Circuses* ST:TOS 2:25; *Patterns of Force* ST:TOS 2:21) or changing an entire people’s conception of themselves and their place in the universe (*For the World is Hollow and I Have Touched the Sky* ST:TOS 3:8) Captain James Tiberius Kirk (even the name is an invocation of *Pax Romana*, predecessor to the *Pax Americana*) and the crew of the USS Enterprise acted not as ambassadors so much as judges, a recapitulation of familiar 19th and 20th century colonial relationships of “exploration.” As V.Y. Mudimbe articulates in his Histories of Africa (1988):

Explorers do not revere otherness, they comment upon “anthropology”, that is the distance separating savages and civilization on the diachronic line of progress. (Mudimbe 1988)

The insertion of the idea of the Prime Directive into *Star Trek* can be read as a direct rebuke of the US involvement in Vietnam (Franklin 1993) and it is in the episodes that deal most directly with Cold War themes, particularly the Vietnam War and US/Soviet relations, that the tension between text and subtext is most clearly visible.

Of the seven episodes that most clearly engage in Vietnam and Cold War narratives, two provide explicit textual support for ways in which the US was prosecuting its foreign policy. In the middle of the second season, *A Private Little War* (ST:TOS 2:19) directly engages with the idea of proxy wars, with the Enterprise stepping in to provide weapons to a technologically primitive society – in defiance of the Prime Directive – that has been attacked by a rival group armed by the Klingons, the Federation’s acknowledged “evil” rivals and *Star Trek’s* surrogate for the Soviet Union (Dittmer 2010). The narrative is not only structured to emphasize the unfortunate necessity of intervention...
to maintain “balance” in foreign conflicts, but also reinforces the contemporary, and false, US Administration narrative that US involvement in Vietnam was a response to prior communist intervention.

However, the most overtly Cold War narrative is The Enterprise Incident (ST:TOS 3:2), an episode in which a rare attempt to overtly critique US conduct was thwarted by network executives in what David Gerrold refers to as “a story as dishonest as anything ever produced on American television” (Gerrold 1984). This episode is modeled directly on the 1968 Pueblo Incident in which a US naval intelligence-gathering ship was intercepted by the North Korean navy and the crew detained for 11 months. In the original script for the September 1968 episode, writer D.C. Fontana issued a direct indictment of the morality of this type of espionage. Sent into enemy space to steal the Romulans’ coveted cloaking device, in violation of the neutral zone treaties that ended the Federation/Romulan war of a century previous Captain Kirk undergoes a crisis of conscience on successfully completing his mission. At the end of the episode, he chooses to defy his orders and berate his Starfleet superiors over their use of espionage to gain an advantage in the arms race with the Romulans. However, before the episode aired, network executives intervened and the script was rewritten to have Kirk return triumphantly to the Enterprise with the stolen intelligence, with only a token discussion at the end from Vulcan first officer Spock about the futility of such espionage in a universe in which the Romulans will simply create a more sophisticated device to counter the stolen intelligence (Gerrold 1984). Thus, an opportunity to enable the audience critically examine the way the US government was conducting the Cold War was lost, and the message once again was of moral superiority and ends justifying means, as long as the agents are on the side of right.

The culmination of the ST:TOS Cold War arc came in 1991 with the sixth of the original series films, in a story that originated with a discussion between actor Leonard Nimoy and writer Nicholas Meyer about translating the fall of the Berlin wall into Star Trek terms. Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country celebrates the end of the Cold War with the fall of an environmentally devastated Klingon Empire and a magnanimous offer of reconstruction assistance by the Federation. Not only has western hegemony triumphed, but it is generous and benevolent in victory, and its assimilation of the cruder colonial power will ensure the orderly transition to a peaceful, mutually beneficial future. Again, the text is superficially critical of the Federation-as-hegemon; representatives of both Starfleet and the Federation are shown to be casually racist, fearful and duplicitous and a plot to assassinate the Klingon ambassador almost derails the entire peace process. But they are isolated incidents by isolated individuals, and there is no critique of the overall end-goal of the film which is to illustrate the benefits of the expansion of Federation (western/liberal) values to a less virtuous culture.

**STAR TREK AT THE END OF HISTORY**

By the time The Undiscovered Country premiered, the second of the franchise’s television series, Star Trek: The Next Generation (ST:TNG), had been on the air for four years and had already established a post-Cold War sensibility in this new Star Trek universe, set almost a century after the first. In a remarkably faithful representation of Fukuyama’s end of history narrative (Fukuyama 1992), this universe firmly occupies a place in which all the liberal ideals from the early 20th century, democracy, altruism, along with more contemporary ideas about inclusion, self-realization and integration are now promoted throughout the Federation and are ideals to which non-members of the Federation should aspire. As Neumann (2003) discusses in his work on Star Trek and diplomacy, since the ideals of Star Fleet are universal, the only role for diplomacy in this universe is to provide an entryway into the Federation for those who do not yet share
those ideals: “The Federation should be loved when known, and in time will be known by all” (Neumann 2003).

Implicit support for US-dominated trilateralism can also be found in the ST:TNG narrative (Collins 1996, Higgins 2012). Despite the apparently overt rejection of capitalism in a universe that is constructed as vaguely post-capitalist, and where early series antagonists take the form of the avaricious and materialistic Ferengi, actual discussion of the economics of the Federation is very limited and deliberately vague. The presentation of the Ferengi as self-aggrandizing, licentious, and visually humorous undercuts any threat that they pose to the Federation and reduces the impact of any real criticism of their economic practices, which are designed to resemble the worst aspects of 19th and 20th century capitalism. This elision of threat sub-textually suggests that the victory of western capitalism is so complete by the 24th century that its remnants are only found in comical, rapacious societies that subjugate women and eschew spiritual and intellectual pursuits in favor of economic gain. The text/subtext dissonance here is striking. The writers are affirming a post-capitalist world, but doing so in such a way that the contemporary dominance of capitalism is re-affirmed. The future becomes post-capitalist, not through the victory of some alternate economic system but because its own success renders a monetary economy obsolete.

By the end of the first season, use of the Ferengi as the primary adversary in the series had created a serious lack of dramatic tension, reminiscent of Fukuyama's lament that life at the “end of history” will be boring (Fukuyama 1989), and required the series writers to create a new, much more threatening adversary. The solution was to introduce the Borg midway through the second season. Militaristic, homogeneous and virtually unstoppable thanks to their ability to assimilate the lifeforms and technology of whatever species they encounter, the Borg provide an interesting point of tension in ST:TNG. While the expansion of the Federation and the conformity of its members to the appropriate cultural and political norms is seen to be good, taken too far, that homogeneity eradicates individuality and is therefore threatening (Hastie 1996).

The threat of the Borg can be read as an indictment of late-1980s global homogenizing processes. However, the subtext supports another strand of American hegemonic discourse, the idea of the primacy of the individual and the importance of self-realization and individual responsibility. It is of course, those ideas that help structure the economic free market systems of the globalized, trilateral world, with its emphasis on reducing government regulation and government safety nets in the interests of expanding economic freedoms. Such contradictions, however, are never made textually explicit in ST:TNG, where there is always clear line between the benevolent offers of inclusion by the Federation and the violent assimilation of the Borg.

These trilateralist and neo-colonialist impulses in ST:TNG go largely unchallenged in the seven season run, even allowing for the strategic interests of the Federation override the particular interests of their citizens. In journey’s End (ST:TNG 7:4), the attempted removal of a group of Native American colonists from their home planet in order to facilitate the Federation peace with Cardassia is framed as unfortunate but necessary for the greater good (Collins 1996). The colonists’ spiritual link with the planet they’ve occupied is dismissed as irrelevant in the face of the need for peace between the two superpowers and here the Vulcan concept of “the good of the many” is used as a way of rationalizing the hegemonic behavior of the Federation.

**STAR TREK AND POST-COLONIAL RESISTANCE**

It is the Federation’s relationship with the Cardassians and the previously colonized Bajorans, that frames most of the narrative of Star Trek: Deep Space 9 (ST:DS9). The arc of the story follows the Federation’s mission to rehabilitate the planet Bajor after its oc-
ocupation by the Cardassians. *ST:DS9* was the first of the Star Trek series to have no creative input from Roddenberry and freed from his overarching vision of a utopian future, for the first time this universe explicitly addresses the problematic nature of expansion and colonialism. Over seven seasons the narrative frequently touches on issues of post-colonial reconstruction, colonial resistance, genocide, biological warfare and war crimes.

It is in *ST:DS9* that the hegemonic subtext of the Federation is critically addressed for the first time. The process of creating an uneasy peace with the Cardassians is disrupted by a group, the *Maquis*, who represent Federation colonists abandoned on the wrong side of the Federation/Cardassian demilitarized zone. Unhappy with aggressive Cardassian attempts to rule these colonies, the *Maquis* conduct active resistance against the Cardassians, but also prove to be a thorn in the side of the Federation who fear the resumption of war on the border and who actively support Cardassian attempts to eradicate them. The resistance attracts covert support from Starfleet, including several renegade personnel who defect to the cause, one of whom clearly lays out the problem with the Federation’s interactions with the *Maquis*:

> Everybody should want to be in the Federation. Nobody leaves paradise. In some ways, you’re even worse than the Borg. At least they tell you about their plans for assimilation. You assimilate people and they don’t even know it.
> Edington *ST:DS9* 4:21

This stealthy conformity is Agnew’s hegemony in action (Agnew 2005). The Federation is the global superpower that uses economic incentives and progressive rhetoric to encourage membership and discourage dissent, especially if that dissent should destabilize the power-relationship with other, rival hegemons. Thus, the natives of *Journey’s End*, and the *Maquis* in general, are abandoned to their fate in the same way as the Kurds or the Palestinians or any other marginalized group whose presence has been a threat to the maintenance of stability in the Cold War and post-Cold War world of US hegemony.

### STAR TREK AND THE ONTOLOGICAL THREAT.

The darker tone of *ST:DS9* is continued in the final Star Trek series, *Enterprise (ST:E)* which premiered only fifteen days after the 9/11 attacks. As with *ST:DS9*, while the text of *ST:E* is darker and more realist than the earlier series, the subtext remains the same. Whatever means Earth and its allies must use to secure the future are justified by the fourth season finale that sees the inception of the United Federation of Planets: western, democratic, liberal and altruistic.

The *Xindi* story arc, from the end of season two through all of season three, directly reflects the post 9/11 American hegemonic view of the world. An unprovoked and unexpected suicide attack on Earth, from a previously unknown alien species (*the Xindi*), kills seven million, and necessitates the end of the Enterprise’s exploration mission and her return to Earth to be rearmed and sent out to intercept and stop any further attacks. This overt militarization of Starfleet continues with the addition of a squad of MACOs (Military Assault Command Operations) to the crew who, when faced with taking action to prevent further attacks on Earth, evidence a rhetoric reminiscent of the post 9/11 US administration:

> We’ll do whatever we have to, Tripp. Whatever it takes. (Captain Jonathan Archer *ST:E* 3:1).

> There’s too much at stake to let my morality get in the way. (Captain Jonathan Archer *ST:E* 3:2).

As morality gives way to expediency in the face of this existential threat all manner of crimes become justified including torture, theft, involuntary confinement and collateral damage. The Enterprise’s mission is clear, not
to negotiate with these new enemies, but to eliminate them. The parallels with post-9/11 America continue even after the *Xindi* war is concluded, with the rise of xenophobic, anti-alien sentiment on earth, accompanied by calls for a rejection of space exploration and a return to a humans-only earth. The last season of the show counters this inward-looking isolationism with a further push for hegemony in the form of the creation of The United Federation of Planets, an interplanetary UN, in which now, the primary players are Human, not Vulcan, and the ideals and virtues of the Federation are self-consciously idealist and American.

*Star Trek: Enterprise* is just one example of a flourishing genre of post-9/11 fear-driven television and film projects that attempt to legitimize American foreign policy through the Manichean lens of “civilization” and “savagery.” From *24* to *Homeland*, through *NCIS* and a host of other primetime offerings, shows that dealt with war and terrorism proliferated in the wake of 9/11. Each week, heroes like Jack Bauer and Leroy Jethro Gibbs escaped the legal consequences of using intimidation and violence to enforce “justice” because they were on the side of “right.” The “civilization” is provided by the American hegemonic rhetoric of democracy, inclusiveness, freedom, and opportunity while the terrorists are the “savages”; irrational psychopaths who cannot be reasoned with, only eliminated. An ontological threat that uses catastrophe and racism to justify violent countermeasures; fear is cultivated as a tool for unity, popular culture doing the work of the state in persuading the masses that violence is a necessary and appropriate response (Takacs 2009).

It is this neo-Hobbesian world, in which militarism is a requirement of security that informs the hegemonic framework of the final *Star Trek* story arc, which is provided by the latest three “alternative universe” films which, like *ST:E*, exist in a post-9/11 universe of global-scale catastrophes. Each of the three movies involves one or more actual or attempted mass annihilations; from the total destruction of the planet Vulcan, to terrorist attacks on London and San Francisco. Each of these narratives exposes large numbers of civilians to mortal danger. In each case the agent of that destruction is a rogue individual defined either explicitly or implicitly as a terrorist. Importantly, each of them exists in what Agamben (2005) calls a “state of exception”: all three antagonists are isolated individuals, separated from their families, homes and even the time period in which they originally operated. Nero is a renegade Romulan from the future; John Harrison — actually Khan Noonien Singh — a man from Earth’s past; and Captain Balthazar Edison, a man from Starfleet’s past.

Edison’s target is the space station Yorktown, positioned on the edge of Federation space as a place for Federation and non-Federation species and cultures to interact. Initially disguised as an alien who kidnaps passing ships’ crews and absorbs them into his drone-army, it appears at first that he represents an anti-colonial push-back against the Federation’s expansionist ambitions: “This is where it begins, Captain. This is where the frontier pushes back” (Edison, *ST:Beyond* 2016).

However, eventually it becomes clear that he is, in fact, a former Starfleet Captain, concerned with the Federation’s willingness to extend peace to former enemies and its inability to adequately deal with the post-war consequences of that peace. Again, while there is critique in this narrative, it is a personal critique. These are problems for Edison, problems that the Federation and Starfleet certainly should have addressed, but there is no criticism of the structure of the Federation. The text provides a superficial tension by showing how flaws in the system affected this one individual, but the subtext is clear. The Federation, as manifest in the multicultural, multispecies, inclusive, prosperous melting pot of Yorktown base, still embodies all the western/liberal virtues of our present globalized economic/cultural hegemony and dissent is atomized, embodied as irrational individuals with personal grudges.
CONCLUSION

One critical component of Agnew’s (2005) discussion of hegemony lies in the idea of consent. Post-WWII American hegemony, and its multinational-western/liberal offspring of the 21st century, rely heavily on the willingness of populations both inside and outside the hegemonic core to be assimilated and to remain convinced of the benefits of assimilation. Much of that consent is manufactured through material consumption, but it is cultural consumption, specifically the dissemination and consumption of popular, western-produced entertainment, that embeds the rhetoric of the hegemonic power as benign and necessary and above, all desirable. Even in ST: DS9 the arc of the Dominion War sets the audience up to understand that while the Federation may occasionally behave in ways that are not ideal, it is only in the interests of preserving wider freedoms from the rest of the universe, made up of overtly aggressive colonizers. In the lexicon of western entertainment vehicles, Star Trek, in both its film and television forms, occupies an unrivaled influence. While film series like Star Wars and the Marvel: Avengers series currently outgross Star Trek film receipts in both domestic and foreign markets, it is Star Trek’s ubiquity and longevity, as well as the ability to draw direct parallels with contemporary geopolitical events, that make it such an important part of hegemonic discourse.

The influence of this huge canon of popular culture cannot be overstated, Star Trek in all its incarnations in showing us a “wagon train to the stars”, has provided a vision of manifest destiny for the 23rd century and a manifestation of American, now more broadly western-liberal, values that has provided a persistent and persuasive component of the manufacturing of consent. Star Trek shows us a future that will be defined by western liberalism and, by implication, that this utopian future will be delivered not by overthrowing the current cultural and economic hegemony, but by continu-

ING on the path of escalating globalization until its “benefits” can be extended to all. Social, economic, cultural and, above all, technological progress can only be achieved by expanding the reach of western liberalism. Even in the most recent film series, there is on-going tension between the text of non-interference – the Prime Directive – and the sub-textual narrative that interference is necessary for the Federation to bring “civilization” to the frontier.

NOTES

1. Balance of Terror (ST:TOS 1:14); A Taste of Armageddon (ST:TOS 1:23); City on the Edge of Forever (ST:TOS 1:28); A Private Little War (ST:TOS 2:19); The Omega Glory (ST:TOS 2:23); The Enterprise Incident (ST:TOS 3:2), Let That Be Your Last Battlefield (ST:TOS 3:15)
2. Trilateralism is the concept of cooperation between the three principal capitalist regions of the world, North America, Western Europe, and Japan, and is promoted by the Trilateral Commission, which was initiated in 1973 to foster increased economic and cultural interaction between these three regions and to ensure the smooth expansion of trilateralist policies (free markets, democracy, and individual liberty) to the rest of the world (Harvey, 2003).

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the proliferation of geographical inquiry into popular culture as a prism for understanding geopolitical processes can benefit from more sustained engagement with psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Melanie Klein. Klein’s account of guilt and the urge to make reparation as both central to the development of conscience and profoundly unevenly distributed contributes to a critique of dominant, uneven geographies of guilt and encourages a nuanced approach to guilt’s potential ethical implications. To illustrate, I identify resonances between the contradictory legacy of the Obama administration and the character of Captain Sisko on the television program Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. Both Obama and Sisko, in some ways uniquely empathetic to the uneven distribution of suffering, also authorize forms of violence that differentiate among the relative values of civilian lives. Yet Sisko’s and Obama’s “bloody messes,” I insist, prove not simply individual failings, but matters of unevenly shared, collectively scaled responsibility.

Key Words: geopolitics, emotional geopolitics, Melanie Klein, guilt, reparation

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary geographical scholarship has tendered greater insight into the role of popular culture in refracting, diffusing and contesting geopolitical processes like nation-building, citizenship, war, terrorism, immigration, climate change, and trade, to name a few (Dittmer 2010, see also Schnell 2011). In particular, attending to the mediations of geopolitics in popular culture offers one way of apprehending the profoundly affective character of geopolitical life. Advocating what she terms “an emotional geopolitics,” geographer Rachel Pain (2009) urges that scholars “rework our understanding of geopolitics to take greater
account of emotions,” and encourages geographers writing on geopolitics to “seek to understand and incorporate emotions in nuanced and grounded ways” (474, see also Pain and Staeheli 2014).

To that end, this paper contends that the endless task of interpreting the emotional and intimate life of geopolitical processes can be helpfully supplemented by more sustained engagement with psychoanalytic theories, which approach the mind, particularly the unconscious, as a social and spatial effect of power (Nast 2000). Following Steve Pile (2010), I argue that scholarship in emotional geographies in general and emotional geopolitics in particular benefits from attending not only to conscious emotions and their political valences, but also to the unconscious, to the contradictions and conflicts within the subject (see Nast 2010).

I likewise build on scholars in contemporary cultural studies (e.g. Eng 2016) in turning to the Austrian-British object relations psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960), whose insights about paranoia, guilt and the urge to make reparation can help to make interpretative sense of fraught geopolitical situations. While Klein has been taken up in some corners of the burgeoning subfield of psychoanalytic geography, particularly in David Sibley’s (e.g. 1995) writing on fear of urban crime and Liz Bondi’s (e.g. 2008) work on gender in therapeutic spaces, she has received far more thorough engagement from scholars in cultural studies working through questions concerning race, gender, colonialism and sexuality (e.g. Eng 2016, Diaz 2006).

What makes Klein so useful for thinking about intimate geopolitics, I suggest, is that her understanding of emotional life treats aggression, envy and rage (conscious and unconscious) as both impossible to eradicate and potentially productive, precisely because of the guilt that often accompanies aggressive feelings. Paradoxically, Klein reads guilt as value-neutral, yet crucial to the formation of conscience. At the same time, her account of guilt also points to its profoundly uneven distribution – and, we might add, geography. Only certain people and populations are deemed worthy of remorse and reparation, and the blame for such uneven distribution lies not only with agents of the state, but unevenly, across entire polities. Klein’s work thus offers an important affective supplement to ongoing geographical debates on mass conflict, complicity, and guilt.

The remainder of this article first makes the case for a renewed consideration of Klein for scholars writing about emotional geopolitics, then puts Klein to work in a close reading of a rich geopolitical and pop cultural text: Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, or DS9. I focus in particular on the characterization of DS9’s protagonist, Captain Benjamin Sisko. Resisting strict analogies, I suggest that Sisko’s professional and political visages in some key respects uncannily prefigure many of the core features and tensions of Barack Obama’s presidency in the United States. While the character of Sisko was developed and produced well before Obama set foot on the U.S. or global political stage, I argue that a Kleinian reading of Sisko might, in an indirect way, provide affective and interpretive resources for making sense of Obama’s contradictory legacy.

The Obama presidency has come to an end. Looking ahead, it surely proves crucial for geographers to reckon with the manifestly spatial designs and practices of the new administration of Donald Trump, particularly with respect to concerns like social exclusion, nation-state sovereignty, environmental destruction, and reconstituted geopolitical order. For perhaps many of us, particularly Obama’s progressive critics, the temptation to wax romantic about the Obama administration (among others) may grow all the more irresistible.

Yet it will also prove crucial to remain committed to the work of critique – what Gayatri Spivak calls “the persistent refusal of that which one cannot not want” (Spivak 2010, 28, emphasis added), work that critical geographers pursue through “ongoing and significant contestation over how we should
interpret existing spatial relations and how we might improve” (Berg 2010, 616-7).

**KLEIN FOR EMOTIONAL GEOPOLITICS**

First, why turn to Melanie Klein for a more refined understanding of the imbrications of geopolitics and emotional life? Rather than review her vast body of work, in the limited space available here, I want to highlight two key aspects of Klein’s observations of emotional life that I argue can help emotional or intimate geopolitics encounter its objects of study differently: (1) her understanding of aggression and guilt as core to both ethical and unethical forms of relationality and (2) her account of the capacity for reparation and forgiveness as unevenly distributed, at multiple spatial scales. It is my hope that papers like this one advance ongoing conversations about Klein’s potential to inform geographical research.

First, Klein understands guilt as both value-neutral and the crucible of conscience and moral development. While guilt has taken on a prevalent connotation as self-indulgent and anti-relational—as more preoccupied with the distance between the guilty subject and her ideal image of herself than with actual harm—Klein’s clinical interpretations of the emotional lives of her child and adult patients tell a more complicated story. In Klein’s view (1975), children unconsciously project aggression and hatred into those they most love and depend on, in large part because of anxiety and insecurity about losing the love of a parent or caretaker. To preserve a sense of safety and continuity, children fantasize about splitting the nourishing “good” parts of the parent away from the “bad,” inconsistent, disappointing or threatening parts. This aggression and hatred, in turn, prompts feeling of guilt and an urge to make amends—what Klein calls, “the drive for reparation” (286). In this way, aggressive, hateful unconscious fantasies end up playing a crucial role in helping people realize what we most love and value, and in the formation of ideals and a conscience that “strengthen… the loving impulses and further… the tendency towards reparation” (279). Crucially, Klein emphasizes relative continuity between childhood and adulthood, suggesting that people continue to go through cycles of largely unconscious hatred, aggression, guilt and reparation toward various other people, ideas, institutions and places throughout their lives. The hope in Klein’s account of subject formation lies not so much in the prospect that the subject escapes this fraught psychic itinerary, as that moments of insight enable the subject to live with impure, sometimes disappointing, but ultimately worthwhile whole objects.

Klein’s (1975) turn to the Greek mythological figure Orestes proffers an instructive illustration of the value of her thinking about emotional life for studies of geopolitics in particular. In her reading of the myth of Orestes, who kills his mother after she kills his father, Klein examines how guilt, and obligations to both his parents, threatens to tear Orestes in two. Persecuted and put on trial for his crime, Orestes is ultimately acquitted by the deciding vote of the goddess Athena. As the goddess of wisdom, Athena presciently suggests that Orestes, who is heir to the throne of the Greek city of Argos, put his profound awareness of his capacity to do harm to work in the service of his citizens.

What might Klein’s reflection on the psychic life of an individual king tell us about the emotional geopolitics of large and complex societies? On the one hand, a focus on the personalities of individual leaders or agents of the state can worryingly personalize, or as Wendy Brown puts it, “Oedipalize” politics (Celikates and Jansen 2012). One might argue in response, though, that the body and the psychical lives of heads of state should indeed refract the contradictions of the social and geopolitical worlds— that such figures should share in Orestes’ sense of wrenching guilt and profound dilemma, if not his bloody deeds. In this sense, Klein’s use of a guilty head of state for thinking about conscience formation is a hopeful story, because it articulates the capacity to work.

"Most Damning of All... I Think I Can Live with It": Captain Sisko, President Obama, and Emotional Geopolitics
through and reflect on inner as well as outer contradiction as a core quality of ethical leadership. As Klein suggests, “People who have more insight into their inner processes and therefore use much less denial are less liable to give in to their destructive impulses; as a result they are more tolerant also towards others” (294).

On the other hand, in the context of democracy – so-called popular sovereignty – it is perhaps more accurate to say that the bodies and psychical lives of all democratic subjects bear ethical responsibility for their state’s bloody acts (Santner 2011), even its most undemocratic ones, and even if they do not bear this responsibility equally. From this vantage, though responses to guilt can surely prove instrumental, guilt itself is not necessarily self-indulgent, but in fact crucial to the formation of conscience for democratic subjects, to the prospect of meaningful political forms of reparation. What Natalie Oswin (2004) writes of complicity in the queer geographies literature could easily extend to geopolitics here: “Instead of thinking complicit space as total and negative, we might reconceptualize it as ambivalent and porous, as an undetermined set of processes that simultaneously enables both resistance and capitulation” (84). As Dittmer (2010) and others have suggested, it is precisely such pressing ethical questions about a kind of complicity and unresolved collective responsibility that popular cultural texts addressing geopolitics mediate and work through.

The diffuse, distributed character of ethical responsibility brings me to the second, profoundly spatial Kleinian insight that might productively inform thinking about geopolitics and emotional life. Klein makes very clear that reparation has an uneven geography — that psychic deliberations about which objects or populations are worthy of remorse and repair are notoriously selective. Many have noted that Klein (1998) makes the worrisome use of colonial metaphor in her writing on reparation, comparing a child’s desire to replenish their psychic life to a colonist’s desire to make reparation to a colonial landscape they have genocidally purged of inhabitants. In a revealing slippage, Klein suggests the colonist’s drive to repair might repopulate the colonial landscape, not with Indigenous people, but with their fellow European nationals (Alford 2001, Eng 2016). To be sure, we have to read Klein against her own Eurocentrism here (Seitz 2017). Yet Klein’s hint that affective reparation has an uneven geography—that people only feel guilty and seek to make amends to certain people or populations that they have harmed harm, and not others—adds important nuance to debates on affective geopolitics. Many important scholars of geopolitics and emotional life have noted the ways in which love, hate and fear are profoundly structured and dispersed on nationalist and white supremacist terms (see Ahmed 2004, Pain 2009). In that vein, Klein indicates that reparative impulses also allow for greater “separation” between loved and hated aspects of a community as they jump scale from family to school to nation. Her view also suggests that people do not only or simply love, hate, or fear at global scales, but they experience conscious and unconscious gradations and itineraries that toggle between and even integrate love and hate, among other affects. Moreover, Klein’s view suggests that guilt can lead to a range of outcomes. Guilt can propel practices of denial, or fake forms of reparation or disingenuous apology. But it can also lead to acts of reparation that are richly informed by greater self-awareness around one’s own capacity to do harm (Alford 2001).

Klein’s complex way of thinking about guilt proves both apposite and essential, I contend, for making sense of the geopolitical legacy of Barack Obama. After all, Obama seemed in some respects quite uniquely sensitive to the uneven distribution of suffering and empathy within the United States. At the same time, Obama’s geopolitical legacy suggests he felt some populations (e.g. most U.S. citizens) were more worthy of remorse and reparation than others (e.g. Iraqi, Afghan, Yemeni citizens or residents), a view that had
deadly and immiserating consequences. With Klein’s insights around guilt and its uneven geography and the contradictions of U.S. geopolitics both in mind, I want to turn to a close reading of Captain Benjamin Sisko, a figure who grapples with strikingly similar affective, ethical and geopolitical dilemmas.

**MAPPING GUILT IN DS9**

I am far from the first to observe that *DS9* is a particularly fecund text for working through the affective and political contradictions of race, sex, colonialism, kinship, or war. Indeed, other scholarly critics have extolled the profound significance of the figure of Captain Sisko as boldly insisting that Blackness has a future (Carrington 2016). Captain Sisko also makes a fascinating interlocutor for President Obama, and not only in identity-based terms. Both are Black American leaders of complex multiracial polities, highly cerebral men of deep religious faith who have cultivated a “family-friendly” image, in contrast to white predecessors (Captain Kirk, Bill Clinton) known for their many romantic liaisons. Both take an approach to “domestic policy” animated by profound empathy for historically maldistributed suffering. Yet both find their efforts are complicated, and at times gravely compromised, by a deep and in some cases misplaced sense of duty to dominant military, economic, and political interests and elites.

The Sisko-centric episode I have elected to focus on here—season six’s “In the Pale Moonlight”—is perhaps the most popular in the entire series. It is also among the most troubling. Indeed, the very features that draw people to *DS9*—its long story arcs, focus on “internal,” psychical life rather than exploration, darker view of the United Federation of Planets and the liberal humanist Enlightenment values that inform the *Trek* franchise—tend to make people especially fond of “In the Pale Moonlight.” Conversely, viewers averse to the series’ complex political storylines or the turn away from *Star Trek’s* confident, white, masculine, “alien of the week” ethos are sour on the episode for a corresponding and opposed set of reasons.

For *DS9*, importantly, is not only a story about fatherhood or diversity, it is also a story about war—about the exceptions, exclusions and lacunae constitutive of liberal democratic orders that can become all the more evident through careful study of war (Reid-Henry 2007). By season six of the series, the United Federation of Planets is embroiled in a devastating military conflict with the Dominion, a totalitarian multispecies empire from the other side of the galaxy. The Federation, allied with the Klingons, is losing badly to the Dominion and their local allies, the Cardassians. As Captain of the space station Deep Space Nine, which lies next to a wormhole to the Dominion’s side of the galaxy, Sisko played an integral role in the ultimately failed efforts to prevent a Dominion invasion, and now helps to lead the war effort.

At this point in the series, viewers had certainly seen Sisko stubbornly, even quite recklessly pursue military imperatives before, particularly around the dogged search for former Federation citizens whom he had viewed as “treasonous.” “In the Pale Moonlight,” however, takes Sisko’s willingness to sacrifice his values (or exploit their inherent contradictions) to fulfill a strategic imperative to new heights. Among the most striking features of the episode—and one that makes it particularly amenable to analysis through Klein—is its focus on Sisko’s internal object world, on the guilty ruminations of a Sisko as a subject. Such a singular focus, an attempt to give narrative coherence to traumatic events, is atypical of *Trek*, and indeed even of *DS9*. The entire episode proceeds as a rather troubled series of attempts at composing a personal log entry. Sisko recounts his efforts to bring the Romulans—a secretive, technologically sophisticated, sometimes antagonistic empire that has signed a non-aggression pact with the Dominion—into the war on the Federation’s side.

The captain begins by recounting his frustration at posting yet another list of Federation casualties, a practice that has
become something of a dour weekly ritual. Commiserating, two of his staff point out that many Dominion sneak attacks on Federation personnel come from Romulan space, a violation of sovereign territory that the Romulans appear willing to forgive or simply overlook. Sisko sees an opportunity, and begins speculating about the strategic advantage of bringing in the Romulans as an ally. One of his officers suggests that to do so, Sisko will need proof that the Dominion has not only briefly transgressed Romulan territory, but actively conspired against the Romulans. Finding such evidence, of course, requires gathering solid intelligence on the Dominion — a suggestion that sends Sisko to Garak, a wry, effete “former” Cardassian spy and the station’s tailor. An exile from his home planet, Garak is the perfect man for the espionage job Sisko has in mind, precisely because, in Sisko’s words, he “specializes in gaining access to places he’s not welcome.”

Garak initially resists the captain’s entreaty to call on his remaining intelligence sources to ferret out evidence of “Dominion duplicity.” Doing so, he worries, “would use up every resource I have left on Cardassia. And it may be a very messy, very bloody business. Are you prepared for that?” Sisko insists he is indeed prepared, averring that given the threat to Federation lives, he will do whatever is necessary. Fascinated by the alacrity of the typically by-the-book Sisko to make recourse to the “bloody” mess of espionage, Garak agrees to help. At this point, Sisko reflects, he had not yet traversed any bright ethical lines. Illegal espionage is normal and expected in a time of war, he reasons. Yet in that moment of assent to Garak’s somewhat nebulously defined “bloody, messy business,” Sisko demonstrated his willingness to go further.

The remainder of the episode toggles largely between Sisko’s reflections and self-recriminations, and increasingly fraught dialogue between Sisko and Garak. Garak’s sources are unable to find any dirt on the Dominion, for the simple reason that they are all killed within a day of speaking with him. “I hope you’re not giving up that easily,” the tailor baitingly tells a rattled Sisko. The two then conspire to construct a fake record of a Dominion plan to attack the Romulans, one sure to have a deleterious effect on Dominion-Romulan relations.

Pursuing this goal, however, requires Sisko to consent to a series of increasingly ethically hazy transactions. First, he must arrange the stay of execution for a talented forger with a penchant for drunken violence. When the forger attempts to kill one of the business owners on the station, Sisko must swallow his pride and buy the victim’s silence. Once the forger’s work is complete, Garak kills him. Next, Garak arranges the purchase of stolen Cardassian technology needed to ensure the forgery’s apparent authenticity — from a seller who only accepts payment in a rare, contraband substance used in genetic experiments and biological weapons. Sisko reluctantly agrees, ordering the recalcitrant station doctor to assist. Finally, Sisko must attempt to convince a Romulan Senator of the putative Dominion threat to Romulans. While initially impressed by the record, the senator takes it for further scrutiny, then furiously confronts Sisko, and in one of the series’ campiest scenes, reproaches: “It’s a fake!”

His desperate machinations exposed, Sisko is despondent — and self-effacing. With no one but Garak aware of the extent of his deceitfulness, Sisko’s reckoning with guilt is a profoundly lonely, anxious, and even paranoid one. When Sisko receives word that the senator has been killed, he flies into a fit of rage, finds Garak, and begins wrathfully beating him.

Garak implores Sisko to let up, and then reveals that their plan will in fact work: Garak, who planted the bomb that killed the Romulan Senator, has carefully manipulated events to place blame at the hands of the Dominion. Here, Garak simultaneously plays the roles of persecutor, defense lawyer, and Athena to Sisko’s guilty Orestes. Admonishing persecutor, ambivalent jury, and empathetic judge, Garak might also be read as a kind of enabling subordinate, speaking from the space of exception, a site of torture or
extraordinary rendition inadmissible in the United States but persistent in grey spaces of exception (Reid-Henry 2007):

That is why you came to me, isn’t it, captain? Because you knew I could do the things you weren’t capable of doing yourself? Well, it worked. And you’ll get what you wanted -- a war between the Romulans and the Dominion. If your conscience is bothering you, you should soothe it with the knowledge that you may have just saved the entire Alpha Quadrant. And all it cost was the life of one Romulan Senator, one criminal, and the self-respect of one Starfleet Officer. I don’t know about you, but I’d call that a bargain.

Later, and alone, Sisko reflects on Garak’s words, simultaneously proclaiming his guilty conscience and seeking to expunge it:

I lied. I cheated. I bribed men to cover up the crimes of other men. I was an accessory to murder. But most damming of all... I think I can live with it. And if I had to do it all over again... I would. Garak was right about one thing — a guilty conscience is a small price to pay for the safety of the Alpha Quadrant. So I’ll learn to live with it. Because I can live with it. I can live with it. Computer — erase that entire personal log.

Yet, and resonant with Klein, repeated viewings of the episode suggest that Sisko is perhaps not so alone in his complicity. Recall the initial suggestions made by his officers – around the advantages of bringing the Romulans into the war, and how one might do so. What would it mean to read such comments as not only soliciting, but as lending legitimacy to Sisko’s actions? What could this affective scene of wrenching but also shared guilt, somewhat tremulous insistence that some populations are more worthy of reparation than others, and disavowal teach us about contemporary geopolitics?

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION: SISKOBAMA?

From one angle, Sisko’s forgery rather advisedly echoed the infamous 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, in which the U.S. National Security Agency dramatically exaggerated claims of North Vietnamese Navy aggression against the U.S.S. Maddox, reports then exploited by the Lyndon Johnson administration to legitimate a dramatic expansion of conventional U.S. military activity in Southeast Asia. Yet one might also think of the Obama administration’s prolific use of drone warfare, and continued use of extraordinary rendition. All of these tactics share in an externalization of responsibility – to CIA black sites, to unmanned vehicles, to a Cardassian spy, to a falsified record or a dead forger – by means of a technical, expert or spatial fix. Yet all such disavowals, devolutions, deferrals and delegations ultimately incur more blood and “mess.” As Ian Shaw (2013) writes of U.S. drone warfare, which has killed hundreds if not thousands of civilians in the Middle East, “while the White House goes to great lengths to connect drone warfare to a clean, crisp battlespace, where the “conduct of war comes to be ever more calculative than corporeal”, the reality for those subject to Hellfire missiles is similar to the drone programme itself: messy and all-too-human” (543). In Kleinian thinking, the externalization of responsibility comprises a “paranoid” orientation toward collective life; instead of asking “What is my role in all of this?” (as Sisko does) one asks, “Why is this happening to me or my fellow nationals?” (Alford 2001). One might wonder: Are Obama and his associates as menaced by guilt over civilian drone deaths as Sisko or Orestes by their transgressions? Are U.S. citizens, or citizens of other nation-states contributing to or benefitting from the “War on/ of Terror” (Pain 2009)? Why or why not? And which citizens?

This paper has offered a narrative lens allowing for a more ambivalent interpretation of Obama’s legacy, with a particular eye toward the tensions in his presidency between
the promise of “domestic” enfranchisement and the consolidation of empire in the putatively “foreign” domain of geopolitics. Indeed, what Baher Azmy, Legal Director of the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, once said of former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder could easily apply to Holder’s former boss:

[W]hat’s disappointing, I think, is that Holder’s great empathy and thoughtfulness about the role of race in this country and state violence in this country, I would have hoped could have informed the use of war and state violence against detainees in Guantánamo, innocent civilians killed by drone strikes abroad, and the simple perpetuation of raw executive power under legal cover (Democracy Now! 2014).

Any account of Obama’s “great empathy and thoughtfulness” on “domestic” matters of race and state violence is surely rendered problematic by the precipitous rise in deportations of undocumented people since 2009 (Rogers 2016). Moreover, a properly geographical evaluation of Obama’s political legacy also requires that one re-entangle the rather neat binary (and often quite masculinity) schism between “foreign” and “domestic” (Loyd 2014, Cowen and Gilbert 2008). Still, the tension between “domestic” empathy and “foreign policy” catastrophe proves to some extent salient, given the often bracketed mass catastrophe that the continued U.S. War on Terror — what Rachel Pain (2009) aptly calls the “War on/of Terror” — has visited upon millions of civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere. Kleinian thinking on the uneven distribution of guilt and reparation proves helpful here; what might it mean to read Captain Sisko’s “bloody messes” — and perhaps, by extension, President Obama’s — as a matter of unevenly shared but collectively scaled responsibility? What instances of guilt and the urge to make reparation might prove empathetic, ethically distributed and geographically transformative?

Critical human geographers have written at length about activist formations that contest both racism and imperialism in ways that flout a domestic/foreign split (see Loyd 2014); my questions are meant to affectively recalibrate how such projects are apprehended. One can love having had a Black president and still relentlessly critique his/our complicity in empire; much of the work of anti-racist, anti-imperialist movement and critique depends on insisting on that very possibility. By asking us to imagine a future that in fact shares many of the contradictions of contemporary liberal empire, DS9 — with a little help from geography and psychoanalysis — proves good to think with for the work of social critique in our dark times.

NOTES

1. For the purposes of this paper, I use “affect” in the psychoanalytic sense of conscious or unconscious feeling or emotion. Following psychoanalytically informed geographers, I understand emotions as simultaneously subjective and profoundly socially organized, but not always accessible in direct or conscious ways. As Pile insists, that humans are both conscious and unconscious creatures, divided, strange to ourselves, “undermines any cognition-centered emotional geography that takes for granted the genuineness of expressed emotions” (Pile 2010, 14).

2. While science fiction is not necessarily reparative, it can enable reparative insights by refracting our unconscious conflicts and desires and projecting them onto alternative futures and worlds.

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ABSTRACT

Star Trek has long used its unique situation as a socially and politically engaged television show to approach contemporary, historical, and futuristic ideas of race, labor, gender, nature, landscape, and place. The concept of alternate perceptions of history continues to provide engaging insights into historical representation. This paper explores how Star Trek, as an example of performance, media, and popular culture, contributes to dialogues of alternate pasts, presents, and futures. It builds upon these concepts to engage with and influence geographical dialogues of public space, nature, geopolitics, and societal structure. I explore examples from the television show and the wider universe, particularly two episodes from Star Trek: Deep Space Nine that are both influenced by historical figures and events and, through time travel, reveal their own historical narratives. While Star Trek continues to operate in fictional space, constructing an ‘idealized’ future and imagined landscapes, this paper recognizes that its influence shapes an experienced and an embodied sense of alternate past, present, and future.

Key Words: Star Trek; popular culture; history; imagined landscapes; futures

GEOGRAPHIES, FUTURES, AND STAR TREK

Star Trek first aired in 1966, followed by thirty seasons across six different series, with the newest premiering in January 2017. The various television shows, thirteen feature films, well over one hundred works of literature, and numerous expressions of fandom through conventions and exhibitions have found their way into the very fabric of our society, influencing even NASA’s first named space shuttle: Enterprise. Star Trek’s place both within and beyond popular culture has enabled it to engage with critical social and political issues. This engagement is enhanced
through the show’s ability to approach modern, historical, and futuristic ideas of race, labor, gender, nature, landscape, and place. Because Star Trek is set between the years 2151 and 2378, even events that occur in our near future, when viewed through the narrative of the show, are examples of alternate “past” narratives. This mirror “back” into our future enables these alternate pasts to become manifest as alternate presents and futures.

Jane Palmer wrote that “the often invisible past may be a source of unexpected alternative futures” (2014, 30). Furthermore, it is important to recognize that our understanding of the past is simply the consumption of events interpreted and written by those with the power and means to do so. In this way, our past is simultaneously real and imagined. Depending on who holds power and how that power is challenged, there are any infinite number of very “real” pasts which can be consumed. These alternative histories, particularly within science fiction, as Barney Warf (2002) stated, hold “important implications for social and spatial analysis” and are inexplicably tied to alternate futures. Uncovering these alternate histories, and giving power to the voiceless, exposes alternative pasts for present and future consumption.

This conceptualization, coming out of the transdisciplinary field of futures studies, has yet to find traction within geographic research. Geographers often allude to the future, through geopolitics (Dittmer and Dodds 2008) and landscapes (Kadonaga 1995), but we have yet to engage with the nearly fifty years of literature, methods, and theory developed in the field of futures studies. This field explicitly addresses the role of futuristic perceptions to tangibly alter our present and our remembrance of the past. One exception to geography’s oversight of futures studies is the work of David Hicks. Hicks (2007, 181 citing Bell 1997, 236) applied futures studies – focused on “discovering or inventing, examining, evaluating and proposing possible, probable and preferable futures”—to geography through education. This article was one of the first times geography addressed futures studies, and it offered valuable perspectives into an enhanced geographic curriculum and pedagogy that encouraged students to actively construct their work around and apply it to perceived future issues and concerns, such as climate change. Hicks, however, does not offer applications of futures studies beyond education and pedagogy.

Despite being one of the longest running and most successful science fiction franchises, Star Trek is woefully underrepresented in geographical engagement, despite the recent popularity in popular geopolitics, cinematic geography, and fictive geographies (Sharp 2000). Probably most notable for geographic engagement with Star Trek was Jason Dittmer’s (2010) monograph, which began by using Star Trek as an allegory for geopolitics. While only a short engagement, Dittmer (2010, xiii) viewed Star Trek not as something that “followed from ‘real’ geopolitics,” but something filled with agency, because to him “[Star Trek] was geopolitics.” Heather Mair (2009) also engaged in this discourse of Star Trek as both imagined and real in an analysis of Vulcan, Alberta. Much like Riverside, Iowa, has transitioned from the fictional to the material “pre-” memorial landscape of where Captain Kirk will be born, Vulcan, Alberta¹ has become a Star Trek-themed tourist destination. Besides hosting signage, artwork, and events from the franchise, the “vulcanization” of Vulcan challenged the community identity by, at times, forcibly embedding ideas of post-capitalist or post-racial society into a traditionally conservative community. Here Star Trek went beyond landscape and “became part of the mix that shapes how community life if experienced over time” (Mair 2009, 480). In both cases Star Trek is not relegated to simple representation of history, but becomes active, embodied, and experienced. In this article, I engage with Star Trek’s role as a memorial landscape, as a space and place of memory, and with its ability to create alternate pasts, presents, and futures, through an in-depth examination of two episodes of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (DS9).
This work forms a new geographical framework utilizing futures studies. Ahlqvist and Rhisiart (2015, 94) cited the necessity for the field of futures studies to continue (and particularly expand) upon its history of critical engagement to contribute in social theory through its transdisciplinary aspects, through its methodological basis, or through its orientation as a discipline combining empirical analysis, specific philosophical basis, imagination, and a practical planning orientation.

While Sardar (2008, 893) stated that geographers were among those engaging with futures studies, Toni Ahlqvist (a geographer himself) and Martin Rhisiart (2015, 94) failed to cite a single study when they stated that human geography was among those social sciences that critical futures studies needed to further engage. This provides further evidence not only for the need to critically engage, as geographers, with the field of futures studies, but the amount to which that engagement has thus far been underdeveloped.

Futures studies engagement with geography, beyond a 1997 special issue in Futures (Batty and Cole), has been limited. Except for Saunders’ and Jenkins’ (2012) research on the role of fear and the envisioning of a future as a response to absent narratives in education, recent research does not follow the call for a transdisciplinary, socially engaged, and multi-perspective geographic engagement with futures studies. This paper begins a critical geographical engagement with futures studies, utilizing an understanding of a socially constructed ideal of the past and future. Davies and Sarpong (2013) stated that it is not the individual components, political and economic influences, imagining of the past, present or future, or the affect of art that forms a study. Rather, an analytical futures studies framework develops from attention to multiple scales, institutions, actors, and times. Futures studies’ unique situation at the confluence of many social sciences and the transdisciplinary nature of blended methodologies, perspectives, and disciplines is a valuable tool for the future geographer.

This work also engages with a unique aspect of landscape studies: imagined landscapes. Drawing on the work of Crouch (2013), Edensor (2005; 1997), Gonçalves (2016), Johnson (2004), Merriman and Webster (2009), Pollock (2004), Rogers (2012), Tyner (2005), and others, this paper examines the role of landscape construction through film, just as others have understood it through dance, theatre, literature, music, and art. In this way, though some of the representations (such as an artwork or a stage) may be visual and material, the experienced cultural, political, social, and physical landscape is constructed mentally. The impact this has on the memorial landscape is equally significant. Edensor (1997; 2005) for example, described the role of the 1995 film Braveheart in crafting an imagined, or “filmic,” landscape of memory and heritage in Scotland, which permeated audiences’ perceptions of Scotland and its history locally and globally, despite certain historical inaccuracies. In this case, the way audiences understood William Wallace, the rural Scottish landscape, and the significance of Scottish nationalism was mythically crafted through the imagined landscapes of the film. Harvey (2013, 153) pointed out this changing trend of heritage landscape analysis: from traditional enquiries of the material “…towards an analysis of the intangible and relational.” In this way, Star Trek is one of these intangible and relational landscape generators. In the examples below, the show provides ideas of both future and past urban, racialized, and class-based landscapes, which can become internalized as representations of what these landscapes might be like.

Star Trek itself has attracted scholarly attention from numerous fields, on subjects as diverse as Cold War geopolitics (Sarantakes 2005), narratology, or the study of narratives, (Jones 2016) and gender representation (Dove-Viebahn 2007). There are also many examples of scholars engaging with the se-
ries as an illustration of alternative pasts and futures. Some work has been done on role of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as a narrative of jazz culture and a uniquely utopian future (Jones 2016; Barrilleaux 2015), but most other examinations take a more critical approach. Of particular interest has been the role of *DS9* in breaking the racial hegemony of “whiteness operating as the determinant of historical memory” (Kilgore 2014, 31-32; Alexander 2016; Pounds 2009).

*DS9* ran for seven seasons starting in 1993 (2369 in *Star Trek* time) and stood apart from the rest of the franchise in two very distinct ways. First, the majority of the show took place on a space station and not a mobile ship, so the show became more about relationships (personal and societal) than about exploration. Second, the captain Benjamin Sisko was played by African-American actor Avery Brooks. As the first Black star and captain portrayed in a *Star Trek* series, the show was presented with a number of obstacles and opportunities. The chief concern was Sisko’s identity, as Alexander (2016, 151) wrote, in other *Star Trek* incarnations, black human characters had few, if any, ties to black history and culture… While race does not necessarily define Sisko’s relationship to the people around him, Sisko retains connections to his racial heritage, and it does help to define his character.

This is done through Sisko’s appreciation of African art, his interest in the Negro Leagues and famous Black baseball players, and his family heritage centered on Louisiana and Cajun food. My focus here is specifically on *Deep Space Nine* and its conceptualization of alternate pasts, presents, and futures.

Pound has argued that *DS9* is set apart from the rest of the series:

> These episodes suggest that at the centre of this new *Star Trek* series is an intention to use its lead character’s complicated identity through which his ethnicity is threaded as a narrative engine for generating stories that might go beyond broken warp coils, trans mats and food processors and begin to ask audiences to be entertained by future societies’ unfinished business in politics, religion, philosophy (issues ranging from defining terrorism vs. freedom fighting, examining euthanasia and exploring military culture vs. peace, etc.), Terran vs alien psychology, race (adoption of children from one alien group by a member of another alien race), being a bi-racial or bi-species being, raising gender issues and the imperialistic lust for power and domination (Pound 2009, 215).

Although *DS9* did so most explicitly, many of the *Star Trek* series have followed creator Gene Roddenberry’s vision that the show fundamentally address current issues (Alexander 2016). *The Next Generation* and *Voyager* both tackled topics of race and gender, for instance, in a multitude of ways (Jones 2016; Dove-Viebahn 2007).

Ostensibly, *Star Trek* depicted a utopian future that is non-racial, non-classed, and non-gendered. However, Kilgore has pointed out the irony in the often Western-oriented, white, human-centered future of *Star Trek* where command still remains “the exclusive right of white (human) males (from Iowa)” (Kilgore 2014, 34). These barriers were later broken down by *DS9* and *Voyager*.

The importance of *Star Trek* is not always in the narratives it provides, it is in the way those narratives are delivered. Because the show is set in the future, it enables audiences to view the show’s past (which can be our present, past, or future) in a different perspective. In other words, when the characters travel back in time, they may be traveling to the time that the show was made, or to any time between the date the show was produced and the date the franchise is set in. Thus, it is possible for the characters in *Star Trek* to travel back in time to the viewer’s future. This enables historic stories that are often untold to be revealed (or changed), helps understand political or social move-
ments through their embodiment in an actor, and enables the viewer to visualize past or future places and landscapes. These may be landscapes we have experienced, imagined, or know nothing about; all are made ‘real’ through the art of science fiction.

EXAMINING THE GEOGRAPHY OF STAR TREK

By conducting critical narrative analysis on Star Trek's content and imagined landscapes, I explore the various ways that Star Trek engages with historical and cultural geography, memory studies, and the role of popular culture in our understanding of history and memory. Narrative analysis has long been used in literature, film, music, and poetry as a means of extracting geographic meaning from media sources (e.g. Tyner et al. 2016; Tyner et al. 2015a; 2015b). Central to narrative analysis is the interpretation of broad themes used to generate meaning.

My focus in this manuscript is on two episodes, both within the same series. I do so for several reasons. First, the series, Deep Space Nine, is heavily cited as the most influential and provocative of the franchise when it comes to dealing with historical narratives. Second, the two narratives I chose are both time travel episodes that venture both into our not-too-distant past and into our future. Third, these two episodes are closely linked to my own expertise in early 20th century African-American history and current issues around the privatization of public space.

The second method I use is landscape analysis. Landscape analysis focuses on the extraction of memory, history, and culture from space and place. Landscapes are windows into the ideology and narratives of those who shape, influence, and experience them, and in the case of Star Trek, offer valuable information about the role of the past, present, and future in historical representation and narratives. Significant as well are the ways that audiences come in contact with these narratives, and that those in power script those narratives. Landscapes include both material artifact and performance, a palimpsest of past, present, and future social and cultural practices and their material evidence, in this case through sets, stages, and cinematography (Schein 2009). Not only do landscapes reveal ‘social worlds of the past’, but they represent continued values of the present (Doss 2010).

IMAGINED LANDSCAPES & ALTERNATE “PASTS” OF STAR TREK

When speaking of Star Trek's creation of imagined landscapes out of events (altered, invented, and/or recreated) in our past, present, and future, the options are endless; the holodeck, time travel, and flashbacks continually offer glimpses into the fictional world's past and often our own present, past, or future. What follows are two examples of Star Trek's creation of these virtual landscapes through the use of time travel. In each section I describe and analyze the imagined landscapes and fictitious narratives, how those imaginary landscapes are also sites of alternate pasts, presents, and futures, and how these concepts situate more broadly within actualized historical landscapes and narratives.

“FAR BEYOND THE STARS” AND THE EMBODIMENT OF THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The most-cited episode in the entire franchise regarding exploration of historical narratives is DS9's “Far Beyond the Stars” (Kilgore 2014; Alexander 2016). In the episode, Captain Benjamin Sisko, played by the African-American actor Avery Brooks, is exposed to an alternate reality where he is actually a 1950s New York City science fiction writer named Benny Russell. The episode embodies a past of both Star Trek's and our own universe, and explores issues of racial bias, segregation, and violence. While not based on any one specific story, the narrative hearkens back to one of Brooks's own roles, as Paul Robeson, the African American singer,
actor, political activist, scholar, and athlete. In “Far Beyond the Stars,” Sisko’s Blackness is both an element that is to be hidden from the readers of the publishing house he is working for and a barrier preventing him from writing the types of stories (with lead African American characters) he would like to. In the episode, Benny Russell attempts to publish a pulp fiction novel about a futuristic space stationed captained by an African-American. Throughout this process he is ridiculed by those in the community and ultimately fired from the publishing firm.

Brooks’s 1995 Broadway performance of Paul Robeson, which depicts Robeson’s similar experiences as a lawyer in 1920s New York, came just three years before the airing of this episode and significantly influenced DS9’s writers and producers. William Shatner even stated in The Captains Close Up (2013), there would be no Star Trek without Paul Robeson. In this way, history (albeit represented in a fictional TV show with fictional characters) is visualized through the characters in Star Trek as embodied and empathized narratives of the past.

The historical landscape is also a significant portion of “Far Beyond the Stars.” Set in 1950s Harlem, there are a number of explicit and banal social and cultural references played out on the landscape. In the show, the publishing office itself is located in the Trill Building, a play on words combining Trill (an alien species common in DS9) and the Brill Building (for which the Brill Building genre of early rock-and-roll music was named). Again, while this is just a fictional landscape, this is still an act of commemoration, just as a university might name a building the Paul Robeson Cultural Center or the W.E.B. DuBois Library. In doing so, power is transferred via the commemorative process. In this case, the Trill Building comes to memorialize “an influential source of national and international musical activity at a crucial transitional stage in the evolution of popular music” (Inglis 2003, 214). Further examples of the historical Harlem landscape are expressed through boxing advertisements, street preachers, and jazz clubs and street performances.

The alternative representation of the past brings the opportunity for alternative presents and futures as well. Star Trek challenges the audience not only to identify with this embodied past, but to place it into the present. This episode particularly highlights the racialized violence of the 1950s. When Benny rushes to help a Black friend of his who has been shot by the police, he himself is viciously beaten badly enough that he cannot go into work for weeks, and even then must use a cane. Similarly, redlining is brought up when the local Black baseball star who plays for the Giants mentions that despite being wealthy he is still unable to live anywhere outside of Harlem.

These events and representations become excellent examples of the blurring of past, present, and future because of their continued relevance today. As Avery Brooks stated,

If we had changed the people’s clothes, this story could be about right now. What’s insidious about racism is that it is unconscious. Even among these very bright and enlightened characters—a group that includes a woman writer who has to use a man’s name to get her work published, and who is married to a brown man with a British accent in 1953—it’s perfectly reasonable to coexist with someone like Pabst [the episode’s antagonist]. It’s in the culture, it’s the way people think. So that was the approach we took. I never talked about racism. I just showed how these intelligent people think, and it all came out of them. (Erdmann and Block 2000, 56)

Such stories in popular culture—about the real Paul Robeson or the imagined Benny Russell—enable relevant issues to transcend scale. They originate as ideas which occur to individual writers, those ideas are then produced at a global scale through television episodes aired around the world, and are interpreted again at the individual level as
audiences watch the episodes. Furthermore, these ideas become embodied in a character with whom audiences empathize and bond. Dittmer and Dodds (2008) studied the role of fandom in geopolitics, but fandom, the deep emotional bond that bridges material and virtual space, has an even broader impact when ideas of equality or social justice transcend the scales involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of popular culture.

The actors themselves speak for this process in a series of interviews about the episode. Supporting actor Armin Shimerman stated in 2002 that “Far Beyond the Stars” was “without a question my favorite episode. Star Trek at its best deals with social issues and though you can say, ‘well that was prejudice in the ’50s,’ the truth of the matter is here we are in the 21st century and it’s still there.” This episode reminds us of that continued prejudice. Co-starring actor Rene Auberjonois said it was “one the best [episodes] of the whole series,” while Avery Brooks stated that “it was the most important moment for me in the entire seven years” (Mission Inquiry 2003).

By connecting the racialized landscapes and spaces of the past to audiences well aware of the current events of the present, episodes such as this hope to influence change in the future. Whether the issue at hand is racial discrimination in the work force or racial segregation and landscapes of violence, presenting both the fictional and real landscapes and events of the past, embodied and experienced through empowering characters helps to challenge the continued social issues we face today.

“PAST TENSE,” PUBLIC SPACE, AND POPULAR CULTURE

DS9’s story arc also explicitly engages in debates and conceptualizations of public space and protest. In the two-part episode “Past Tense,” audiences are exposed again to a historic narrative, only this time, despite traveling back in time, the entire show takes place in the audiences’ future. The episode takes place 350 years before the time of DS9, which situates the events in the year 2024, thirty-one years after the episode’s 1995 airing. The plot of the episode centers on the notion that in the early 21st century the United States abandoned economic or medical support for citizens. Most cities then create what are called Sanctuary Districts, which were supposed to be safe economic zones where the homeless and unemployed could voluntarily go to seek employment and safety. The landscapes we see through the eyes of the Star Trek characters, however, are virtual prisons, entire blocks where anyone who is homeless, unemployed, or mentally ill are forced to go and then unable to leave. Inside, there are food and housing shortages, internal gang violence, and daily examples of police brutality. The plot of the episode revolves around staging a protest (known in the 24th century as the Bell Riots) to expose (and ultimately end) this enclosure and criminalization of public space and to bring back the 1946 Federal Employment Act, which was dismantled at some time prior to the riots.

In the episode, the dialogue between Captain Sisko and Dr. Bashir is revealing as to how the Bell Riots come to be memorialized in the future:

Sisko: You ever hear of the Bell Riots?
Bashir: Vaguely
Sisko: It is one of the most violent civil disturbances in American history and it happened right here, San Francisco, Sanctuary District A, the first week of September 2024…
Bashir: Just how bad are these riots going to be, Commander?
Sisko: Bad. The Sanctuary residents will take over the district. Some of the guards will be taken hostage. The government will send in troops to restore order. Hundreds of sanctuary residents will be killed… The riots will be one of the watershed events of the 21st Century. Gabriel Bell will see to that.
Bashir: Bell?
Sisko: The man they named the riots after. He is one of the sanctuary residents who will be guarding the hostages. The government troops will storm this place based on rumors that the hostages have been killed. It turns out, the hostages were never harmed because of Gabriel Bell. In the end, Bell sacrifices his own life to save them. He will become a national hero. Outrage over his death, and the death of the other residents will change public opinion about the sanctuaries. They will be torn down, and the United States will finally begin correcting the social problems it had struggled with for over a hundred years. (Past Tense, Part I 1995)

These conditions, while both fictive and futuristic, are based in historical events and speak to numerous geographical concepts. Gross and Altman (1995) reveal that Ira Steven Behr, a co-writer of this episode, based it upon two historical events: the 1971 Attica Prison riot and the 1970 Ohio National Guard shootings which killed four and injured another nine students on the Kent State University campus.

Chief among these geographical explorations is the theme of public space and its privatization (Mitchell 1995; 1997; 2003; 2005). We see this trend continuing in our future (or our alternative future). In the episode, the characters who time-traveled to what appears to be a ultra-modernized San Francisco Financial District are almost immediate accosted by law enforcement for laying down on the sidewalk next to subway station. Furthermore, once the protests in the sanctuary campus begin, there is an almost immediate response from local law enforcement and then the federal military to use force to quell the protest.

Post (2016), in a recent publication on public space and memory of the May 4 sites of Kent State, echoed these concerns about the privatization of public space. Overall, we are seeing the progressive neoliberalization of spaces of assembly, free speech, and protest. In the episode, not only is homelessness criminalized, those who violate such laws by not having a job in the ultra-capitalist future literally become less-than-human and are instead referred to through derogatory code names such as “dims” (i.e. the mentally ill) or “gimmies” (i.e. the homeless or unemployed). As one character in the show states, “the social problems just got too big… [people] forgot how to care” (Past Tense, Part II 1995).

One problem we continually see in commemorative space is the continued exclusion of certain narratives. Post (2016, 148, 150) addressed these concerns in the context of May 4 and “the annihilation of public space” as he stated, we need “a public pedagogy outside the classroom that empathizes with the causalities of tragedies such as May 4 and re-humanizes those victims…” Star Trek provides this pedagogy for both May 4 and other excluded narratives through the processes of embodiment. Humanizing narratives and ideologies, and exposing discourses that have been or are in the process of being threatened, such as human rights, public space, and processes of protest and activism, are key functions of this episode. And while these narratives are fictional, they instill powerful ideas of what could be remembered while still drawing from very real historic events and landscapes, such as May 4 and the Attica Riots.

CONCLUSION

Through the futuristic lens of history, Deep Space Nine challenges hegemonic conceptualizations of race and public space in our past, present, and future. Viewing these exposed (and often excluded) narratives opens the possibility for an alternate future on the grounds of a better understanding of racial discrimination, police brutality, homelessness, capitalism, and public space, both in our past and our present. This research paves the way for multiple future
studies. Further engagement with Star Trek by geographers is necessary, especially as the films and new television series garner attention. The feminized spaces in Voyager, for example, or a post-colonial or Marxist theorizing of the franchise as a whole have yet to be undertaken. Such work seems likely to reveal future affect and power structures imbued within the multiple manifestations of the series. Further engagement between media geographies and popular geopolitics and futures studies is also necessary. Finally, the material culture and spatiality of Star Trek through exhibitions, conventions, and other places of fandom have yet to be explored.

Deep Space Nine explored racialized, privatized, and exclusionary landscapes. The landscapes, however, are unlike those of, say, Martin Luther King Jr. (Alderman 2003) or slave narratives (Schein 2009), whose histories are rooted in a supposedly “true” past. Here, an imagined future’s imagined past (at times our present) is experienced through film and television. This empowers audiences to ask questions previously not thought of, expanding both the experiences of individuals and the possibilities of geography (Kadonaga 1995). Such fictionalized performances of memory are just as much key elements of historical representation as traditional memorial landscapes, because they similarly evoke emotions, narrate historical pasts in order to shape alternate futures, and are emotionally, visually, and sonically experienced. Likewise, science fiction employs the power of memory, memorial landscapes, and the development and transcension of space and place to shape alternative pasts and futures. In this way, both science fiction and memory serve as powerful agents for social justice and shapers of place, space, narrative, and landscape. These places, spaces, narratives, and landscapes of Star Trek, while often imagined, are embedded with meaning which have continually been written, re-written, and contested to address alternate pasts, presents, and futures.

NOTES

1. Vulcan is the name of the planet and species that Spock is from. Vulcans are both the first alien species to formally make first contact with humans and one of the original and primary civilizations in Star Trek’s United Federation of Planets.

2. In the holodeck, environments, people, and experiences were holographic. These rooms, or alternative versions of the holodeck, were prominent features of The Next Generation, Deep Space Nine, and Voyager. They enabled those who experienced these spaces to speak to historic individuals, relive pivotal moments from the past, or combine these past people and places with contemporary situations.

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REFERENCES


Mission Inquiry: Far Beyond the Stars: An In-Depth Look at One of the Most Acclaimed Episodes in Star Trek History. 2003. Paramount. DVD.


This article considers the work of Giorgio Agamben’s ‘Anthropological Machine’ (2004) in the depiction of human-nonhuman interactions in Star Trek. While Star Trek aims to present a utopian vision of the future, a contradictory reading is equally plausible. Instead of embracing novel encounters with nonhuman life and technology, Star Trek retreats into an idealized vision of the human. Encounters with the nonhuman become vehicles through which to reinforce this vision of a bounded and pure human subject. In Star Trek, humans are made to be human through their constant encounters with nonhuman forms, and the possibility of nonhuman flourishing is constantly foreclosed upon. However, in foregrounding these boundary struggles, Star Trek unwittingly deconstructs its own vision of the human subject. The more difference that Star Trek presents, the more apparent it becomes that the human subject to which it is compared is itself an unstable entity.

Key Words: Star Trek, anthropological machine, posthumanism, Othering, cyborg

INTRODUCTION

Star Trek has one of the most extensive run-times in the history of science fiction film and television. In turn, this has led to the creation of a rich and complicated mythology attracting a plethora of academic interest in both its fans and its content (Kerry 2009; Tullock & Jenkins 1995). This depth of interest contributes meaningfully to the show’s richness as a text, whilst simultaneously providing a large pool of literature from which to draw ideas and inspiration. As the other articles in this special issue help to demonstrate, Star Trek is an ideal experiment-space in which to explore the cultural anxieties of its originary culture and how these have evolved over the past 50 years (Barrett & Barrett 2001; Richards 1997). Star Trek is fictional, but
there is something particular about science fiction as a genre: it takes the unreality of its premise and attempts to deal with it seriously, creating characters that respond to imagined worlds in plausible ways (Kitchen & Kneale 2002; Suvin 1979). It is a genre which has inspired many of the scientific advances it initially conjured as fantastical (Dator 2012). As a consequence, science fiction opens up a unique and resonating “metaphorical double-space between real and framed space” (Ballhausen 2009, 35; also Connolly 2011; Poulaki 2010) that helps to shape reality even as it seeks to reflect it.

With Star Trek returning to television in 2017 with CBS’ Star Trek: Discovery, it seems prudent to re-examine the imaginative world that this media franchise constructs and the messages we might take away from it. This article focuses on how Star Trek presents a vision of humanity’s future. This analysis considers Star Trek as a machine that produces and discloses worlds through the deployment of particular discourses (Ivakhiv 2013). The article begins by considering Star Trek alongside posthumanist literature. Thereafter, the article considers human interactions both with alien life and with technology. In both instances we find that, in spite of the potential to radically reshape how we think about humans, interactions with alien life and technology in fact do the opposite. Aliens and technology are both used as points of difference, divergences from an idealized human norm that are used to illustrate what does and does not constitute a bound subject that we might call ‘the human.’ In tracing the above, something Agamben (2004) calls the ‘anthropological machine,’ we can locate an underlying instability in Star Trek’s concept of the human. In Star Trek, the human is not a coherent entity but something rather more fluid: an ideology that works to preserve itself by identifying ‘human’ traits in aliens and technologies and subsuming them under a banner of humanity. This perpetual reimagining of the human in the face of new externalities maintains a paradox at the heart of the show, in which otherness remains at the forefront of the narrative despite constant attempts to subjugate it. Far from the utopian imaginary of Gene Roddenberry, for whom Star Trek presented a bright inclusive future, I might suggest that in reality Star Trek represents a somewhat more regressive vision of humanity’s future.

**TRACING ‘THE HUMAN’**

It is a gross simplification, but I might suggest that modernist thinking imagines the human in greedy and essentialist terms. Writings on the ineffable qualities of the human, and humanity’s place at the top of the great chain of being are in no short supply (Frayn 2006; Fukuyama 2002). This kind of thinking serves to render the human as the embodiment of a cultural and evolutionary apex, knowable only unto himself, and a safeguard against a ‘moral chasm’ of the nonhuman world below (Castree et al. 2004, 1345). Against the chaos of the nonhuman world, modernist thinkers have attempted to ‘fix’ the human subject, making a stable entity out of a bundle of contradictions (Pettman 2011, Braun 2004). Importantly, it is the very desire to maintain sharp distinctions between what is human and what is not that has created a proliferation of hybrids that do not map to either status. In this sense, the modernist imaginary of the human has been about purification and hybridization, with the first activity celebrated and the latter denied (Bennett 2001, 96; Latour 1993).

At the heart of this paradoxical dynamic lies Agamben’s ‘anthropological machine’. The machine functions such that if we accept the modernist vision of the human, we commit to a “state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the exclusion of an outside” (Agamben 2004, 37; also Pettman 2011). Despite having no inherent characteristics of its own, an idea of the human can be perpetually recycled in contrasting terms to what it is assumed not to be, producing stability for the notion of humanity through perpetual...
Othering. In response, posthumanist thinking has sought to destabilize the boundaries that hold this anthropological machine together. While some authors argue that modernism itself was never a coherent project (Latour 1993; Haraway 1991; Braun 2004) the notion of ‘post-’ state provides a useful grammar for changing our interpretation of entities like the human that modernism (broadly) treats as stable. At the heart of posthumanist thinking is a desire to look across assumed dividing lines between the human subject and the nonhuman world and to engage with the hybrid identities that modernist thinking actively denies a clear status (Stevenson 2007; Pettman 2006; Haraway 2004; Wolfe 2003; Bingham 2002). Rather than being discrete in any essential way, the human and the nonhuman are “disassembled and reassembled from the other beings in our worlds with their own partial and fractured identities” (Stevenson 2008, 103). Whether we take posthumanism to be an ideological framework (Campbell 2006) or a deconstructive perspective (Castree et al. 2004), both enact the very possibility of change, creating a space to transcend the “vision of disconnection that has isolated the human for so long in its own conceit of uniqueness” (Clarke 2008, 196). It is by engaging with these posthumanist themes and their destabilization of the human subject that we can expose how the human subject of Star Trek is in fact wholly contingent on juxtaposition with and assimilation of the Other.

THE FLOURISHING OF OTHERS IN FEDERATION SPACE

Star Trek set out its utopian credentials early on, positing a post-scarcity future world far removed from the reverberations of twentieth-century war. Nonetheless, when we start to peel away at Star Trek’s representations of alien life, we find a more uncomfortable narrative. We start to recognize a colonialist vision that rejects nonhuman perspectives (Geraghty 2007; Barrett & Barrett 2001) and celebrates the use of technological power in their subjugation (Ono 1996). Contra to Star Trek’s intended message, the Federation’s mission is not so much to explore the galaxy, but rather to impose its values on those whom it encounters (Tullock & Jenkins 1995). Space travel becomes a metaphorical extension of the American West, and in so doing fulfills the American dream by providing an endless ‘final frontier’ in which expansionism is wholly naturalized (Shaw 2006). The clarion call of the Federation, to both ‘seek out new civilizations’, and ‘boldly go where no one has gone before,’ only makes sense when we read it through the recursive lens of a frontier ideology “which grants new civilizations existence only to the extent that the originary culture has found them” (Fulton, quoted in Shaw 2006, 67). Despite lofty ideals, Star Trek nonetheless takes a kind of human exceptionalism for granted (Short 2003; Jenkins & Jenkins 1998), an act that diminishes the possibilities for interacting with alien life in meaningful ways. Of course, it is not with the intention of diminishing the potential of nonhuman life that Federation crews set out. Instead they are governed by the ‘Prime Directive’, the command that they are not to interfere with the development of alien cultures. The Prime Directive is the only codified ethic we encounter in the Star Trek canon, and it is designed to prevent the protagonists “from turning into the kind of monsters and bullies against which they fight” (Bertonneau & Paffenroth 2006, 83). Adhering to this code serves to make the protagonists better than the misguided entities they encounter (Boyd 1996, 81). We see this dynamic in TNG’s “Encounter at Fairpoint” (1987) and the 2016 film, Star Trek Beyond. Nonetheless, the Prime Directive almost always disappears when the Federation is faced with a contest of equals (Richards 1997, 14). In this way, the Prime Directive becomes a tool for diminishing human culpability for moral conduct; a lofty ideal that is ignored where it jeopardizes the safety of Starfleet crew. In this sense the Prime Directive is a false morality; because it is treated as valid only where it is assumed that it will be ac-
cepted and reciprocated. It creates a space for alien life so long as it acts ‘human’.

The Prime Directive is designed to mediate interactions with ‘undeveloped’ species, but it does not provide a vocabulary for similarly developed, yet different, species. Religion is dismissed as backwards (Ber- tonneau & Paffenroth, 2006) and cultural practices belittled in subtle ways (Richards, 1997). Star Trek’s indifference to those characteristics shared by its protagonists and the aliens they encounter only highlights the differences that remain. Undoubtedly a consequence of budget, the vast majority of the species given significant airtime look mostly human. Nonetheless, Star Trek retains a cheap visual trick of distinguishing good aliens from bad aliens with the use of contrasting soft and hard facial features. We know that Bajorans, Vulcans, Romulans, and the Trill must share our values because they look like ‘us’. Reminiscent of early theories of scientific racism (Gonineau 2010), the Klingon, Romulan, and Cardassian peoples have ugly, ominous features, and their association with national and political stereotypes—Klingons as Germanic barbarians, Romulans as Romans, Cardassians as Nazi—clues us as to their intentions (Barrett & Barrett 2001; Jenkins & Jenkins 1998). The disconcerting use of actors from nonwhite ethnic groups to represent aliens—like Michael Dorn as Lt. Worf—leaves difference highlighted “both internally and externally to the story” in problematic ways (Richards 1997, 9; also Greven 2009). Part of the key issue stems from the essentialist and progressivist view of evolution Star Trek adopts. Evolution (both biological and cultural) is not understood as a random process of adaptation, but rather as a tool of progress towards a better—ideally humanoid—end state (Wagner & Lundeen 1998; Porter & McLaren 1999). As we see in TNG’s “Genesis” (1994), to bend away from this trajectory is to devolve into monsters. This creates a sterile universe where the possibilities for truly alien encounters are fleeting and rare.

Novel lifeforms do appear, but their treatment by the show and its characters is rarely better. Instead it is only in death that alien flourishing becomes permissible. In TNG’s “Emergence” (1994) the Enterprise starts to malfunction after randomly jumping to warp speed. However, it quickly becomes apparent that, had the ship not done so, it would have been destroyed. An investigation leads to the conclusion that the ship is beginning to show signs of an emerging sentience. Eventually, the ship’s efforts lead to the creation of a new lifeform (with the ship itself conveniently ‘dying’ thereafter). Picard lets the emergent life leave the Enterprise on its own terms. In his view, the creature has been born of the memories of everyone on board; assuming his crew’s conduct has been honorable, so too must the emergent life form be. It is, after all, the sum of their memories from which this creature has been born. In both cases, the currency of freedom is won as a result of the visible presence of human emotion, and on the judgement of the highest ranked Federation officer present. In TNG’s “Galaxy’s Child” (1991), the Enterprise encounters a large creature in deep space which they accidentally kill during defensive maneuvers. Discovering that the creature was pregnant the crew performs an emergency caesarean using the ship’s phasers. Crucially, sympathy for the creature is anchored in the metaphorical space of mammalian reproduction, enabling rescue from the dead mother’s ‘womb’ by ‘C-section’, and thereby avoiding confrontation with body-space challenges or novel biology (see Lorimer 2007, 920). When the newborn then attaches itself to the Enterprise in order to feed, it is no longer the act of a parasite, but rather an act of nursing. The analogy carries through to the episode’s conclusion, wherein the newborn is detached once they “sour the milk.” The creature’s physiological similarities dissipate its otherness and afford the Federation a position of scientific authority over the creature by being the only ones capable of birthing it. In the process the creature’s fundamental novelty is bartered away in return for empathy.
Despite consistently negative treatment of alien life, the trend of aliens longing to experience human life constitutes a constant throughout Star Trek. From TOS’s omnipotent Trelane in “The Squire of Gothos” (1967) to the noncorporeal beings found in TNG’s “The Child” (1988), “Clues” (1991), and “Imaginary Friend” (1992), Star Trek lauds human curiosity. These episodes constitute a raw celebration the power of our supposed illogicality to uncover new truths. This supposedly fundamental aspect of humanity seeks to pique the aliens’ curiosity about us, and not the other way around. Greven (2009) suggests that Star Trek’s strength lies in its willingness to question authority, but in allowing Captain Picard in TNG the opportunity to explain the value of parental authority, “The Child” and “Imaginary Friend” actually serves to reinforce and reify human preferences. In TOS’s “By Any Other Name” (1968), a group of stranded Kelvins take human form to in order to capture the Enterprise. Thanks to the Kelvins’ unfamiliarity with their newfound human form, the crew is able to recapture their ship, and Captain Kirk overwhelms the lead female by kissing her and forcing a human emotional response from her. The Kelvins learn to recognize the value of the human form and they abandon their attempt to hijack the Enterprise.

Voyager’s “In the Flesh” (1998) works with the same idea. Encountering a Species 8472 staging point for a reconnaissance mission against the Federation, the crew of Voyager beams aboard to discover that Species 8472 have genetically modified themselves to physically imitate mankind. Ultimately, détente is achieved thanks to the superior moral judgement of Captain Janeway. Once more, however, it is a male character’s dalliances that strike the winning blow. To extract information, Commander Chakotay attends a date with an 8472 disguised as a female human, although they are both aware that the other is an imposter, he slowly earns her trust. Finally, it is a kiss that they shared earlier (used at the time to acquire a DNA sample) that the 8472 seeks to revisit at the end of the episode. Embodiment does not serve to allow the aliens to experience humanity from their own perspective and comment on it, so much as to reinforce a belief in humanity’s superior facets. And, while Wilcos (1996) suggests that miscegenation can undermine the othering process (69), in Star Trek this power is exclusively wielded by male humans over female aliens. In the process, the kiss becomes a weapon by which to extend the human self onto the other (Pettman 2006), and the moment of emotional realisation exists as a transformative epiphany for the alien who cannot normally experience such things. Aliens become pitiable things that lack our own heightened emotional repertoire (Žikić 2010).

The rugged-male stereotypes embodied by TOS’s Kirk, TNG’s Riker, and Voyager’s Chakotay tie in with a larger undercurrent that presents the “modern, Western, nuclear family as the acme of social development” to be united under the watchful eye of male authority (Shaw 2006, 67). In this sense, the anthropological machine works such that others must continually seek to meet us on our terms if they wish to flourish or be granted legitimacy in a galaxy that Star Trek presents as Federation space (Boyd 1996; Hanley 1997).

**TAMING THE CYBORG**

The dividing line between alien other and technological other is not always clear-cut in Star Trek, but there are very few representations of explicitly alien-technological hybrid characters in Star Trek. Where they do exist, the dual facets of their being are treated separately. What this suggests is that, similar to Star Trek’s treatment of alien alterity, the show is uncomfortable with the existential risk that technology presents to its imaginary of the bounded human subject and instead seeks to manage the role of technology. Curiously for a show about (mostly) human space exploration, Star Trek does not dedicate much effort towards depicting the technologies that permit human space flight in practice.
Humans cannot survive the vacuum of space unaided, and must instead rely on a plethora of technologies to do so (Cortellessa et al. 2009). Away from the comforts of a home world—and the prospect of support and resupply—the importance of a closed loop between human and technological systems becomes essential (Lester & Thronson, 2011; Kalery et al. 2010; Cortellessa 2009). Nonetheless, Star Trek buys into a myth that emerged from NASA's paradigm of space flight in which the human pilot was given extensive control over flight controls and other systems despite the superior ability of automated systems to handle these tasks (Dator 2012, 59). Thus, in Star Trek, the ship is little more than a bubble which protects the crew; a representation that absolves the characters of the need to form meaningful relationships with the technology on which they are so thoroughly dependent (see Kendrick 2002).

Instead, technology only becomes visible where it threatens the show’s protagonists. Whether through the ever present risk of warp core breach or the failure of life-support-systems, Star Trek often diminishes the techno-human relationship at the heart of human space flight. Star Trek treats biotechnology with particular contempt, reducing it to the cause of humanity’s own ‘historic’8 eugenics wars and placing it at the center of the Dominion’s aggressive and violent war (as portrayed in the latter seasons of DS9). It appears that Star Trek has a “[deep], principled reason for machine failure,” with the implication that machines are incapable of dealing with the irrationality of the human condition and the supposed paradoxes that result from it (Hanley, 1997: 57). TOS in particular regularly dismisses technology in such a way, with Captain Kirk regularly using daft logic loops to do away with murderous computers. The implication is that machines might have the capacity for superior intelligence, but their obedience to logic denies them the proverbial ‘right stuff’ (see Wolfe 2005) possessed by humans.

Despite this broad discomfort with technology, Star Trek does make space for a pair of technological hybrid characters with more-than-human potential: the android Data, and a rescued (cy)Borg drone called Seven-of-Nine. Nonetheless, both of these characters fulfills a similar narrative purpose. They abandon the facets of their personality that make them distinct in order to be more human. This character trope was arguably established with Spock in TOS, who—while imbued with superior strength and logic—is defined more by his companionship with the emotionally charged Kirk. Data and Seven-of-Nine follow a similar narrative arcs. Both look mostly human—distinguished only by yellow skin and remnant Borg implants respectively—and both possess a posthuman human level of intelligence that regularly saves their human counterparts. Nonetheless, this more-than-human potential is made into a problematic otherness. In TNG’s “Elementary Dear Data” (1988), “Data’s Day” (1991), “In Theory” (1991), and the movie First Contact (1996), Data moves in the opposite direction of many characters in posthuman literature, as he delimits his more-than-human potential for the sake of forming emotional connections with the humans that surround him (Stevenson 2007).

Star Trek constantly demands that Data strive to be human (it is his self-avowed ambition), while simultaneously denying him the possibility that this ever could happen. In fact, Data only comes close to this goal on three occasions. The first is in “First Contact,” wherein the Borg Queen attempts to corrupt his allegiance to humanity by offering him his own, in the process giving him artificial skin. The choice is of course unfair, hampered by the realization that to accept this Faustian pact would be to destroy humanity, thereby rendering his own goal pointless. The second is in attempting vengeful murder in “The Most Toys” (1990). But in granting Data human imperfection, the episode brings him closer to his goal “than we would ideally desire” (Short 2003), and reminds us that nonhumans who mimic un-

Star Trek and the Anthropological Machine: Eliding Difference to Stay Human
desired human flaws are intolerable (Pettman 2011). When Data’s experience is contrasted with that of Captain Picard we find a productive paradox. Picard himself has an artificial heart and was once assimilated into the Borg collective. Nonetheless he gets to maintain an essential humanity—a product of birth—that is denied to characters who are not born human, no matter how hard they might work to ‘earn’ that humanity.

Many elements of Seven’s narrative mirror that of Data. In her case, however, she moves from a technologically augmented Borg drone—the “morally repugnant” (Porter & McLaren 1999, 74) and dystopic vision of the synthesis between humanity and machine (Cowan 2010)—to a ‘normal’ heterosexual human female capable of forming relationships and even falling in love. What is particularly interesting about Seven is the way in which her sexuality is used against her to disrupt the potential for any pleasure to be found in the confusing boundary between organism and technology (Haraway 1991). Rather than inhabiting a space from which biological determinism can be suppressed and contained, and traditional boundaries of gender and sexuality be overcome (Campbell 2006), heteronormative notions of femininity and being are reinforced by Seven’s journey towards the human. Throughout her recuperation she is refolded into the familiar social mesh of female objectification, as in Voyager’s “Someone to Watch Over Me” (1999) in which she is pursued by many of the show’s male characters. Disappointingly, Seven even goes so far as to embrace this tendency, constantly making use of the show’s holodeck to reimagine herself without her Borg implants. Throughout the episode “Human Error” (2001), Seven struggles to find a balance between her work and emotional life, jeopardising the crew due to an inability to concentrate on her job in astrometrics. Regardless, this episode makes it clear that submission to femininity and emotion, and an abjuration of her Borg-human hybridity, are essential even if it threatens her more-than-human potential.

The treatment of Seven’s femininity in this way is entirely consistent with older Star Trek adventures. As Cranny-Francis notes regarding Kirk’s many dalliances in TOS, Kirk only has eyes for “the passive, submissive, girlish, instinctive, and compulsively emotional child-woman, whom he almost invariably ‘loves and leaves’” (1985, 275). In the episode “Elaan of Troyius” (1968), Kirk thwarts a female character who violates their ‘natural role’ by attempting to usurp his own leadership role. Representation of powerful females is never favorable, variously portrayed as “siren, temptress or whore” (Cranny-Francis 1985). The only female for whom this portrayal is convincingly avoided is Dr. Carol Marcus, with whom he is bound by a male child. As becomes apparent for Seven, her power over the crew is not a result of her intellectual prowess—she is almost always awkward in social interaction—but rather in the eroticism of her corseted sexbot physical form.

Further, despite this setup, the possibility of machine-sexuality is left untouched. The film, Star Trek: The Motion Picture (released 1979) contains no reference to human-human sexuality despite the ‘merger’ of human crew members with a sentient probe. Tellingly, the female crewmate only participates due to her affections for the male (Blair 1983). In this way, The Motion Picture sets a precedent for later characters implying a compulsory and subservient heterosexuality (Dove-Viebahn 2007; Shaw 2006). With the revelation in the series finale of Voyager (2001) that Seven has married Lt. Commander Chakotay, “a clear equation is made between humanity and heterosexuality, belying the promise of a character whose first close emotional relationship was with [the female] Janeway” (Shaw 2006, 70; also Pettman 2011). Ultimately, Seven’s identity is not subject to the novelty she brings to the show’s character set, but by her willingness to conform to existing gender roles. It is a disappointing conclusion to a narrative arc that is mirrored in the nightmare matriarchy the show eventually constructs around the
Borg. It renders Seven’s soft femininity even more sympathetic but implicitly reinforces the normalcy of the Federation’s own patriarchal leadership (Balinisteanu 2012).

CONCLUSION

In the film The Undiscovered Country (1991), Kirk tells Spock that “everybody’s human,” by which “he really meant that everybody he liked was human” (Barrett & Barrett 2001, 62). In this way, Star Trek sets a precedent for downplaying difference by implying it is only a superficial mask to fundamental similarities (Boyd 1996). This obsession with blanketing all characters under an ever-expanding rubric of ‘humanity’ demonstrates a core discomfort with the consequences of difference despite the centrality of difference to the narrative world that Star Trek creates. While Star Trek has sought to forward a utopian vision, it is hobbled by its own unreconstructed vision of the human, so much so that it became a tool for espousing a series of more dangerous myths. Star Trek demonstrates a recursive construction of the human subject through difference. The interstellar proliferations of Star Trek’s own anthropological machine are always inhibited by a play of continuity and difference of form that must be maintained in order for us to be human (Parker 1984). Throughout the show, this anthropological machine preserves the human by constantly eliding difference and reconfiguring the boundaries of humanity in the face of new externalities. As a result, Star Trek maintains a commitment to centrality of the human subject to all our notions of justice (Fukuyama 2002).

In Federation space, the only emotion is one of welcoming, provided one checks unwanted baggage at the door. Even the nastier traits of humanity—like the Moby Dick-inspired obsession and vigilante justice we occasionally witness in the Star Trek movies—gives way to a smug pride in the homogenizing power of the Prime Directive. As Pettman notes, pride in no longer punishing animals “rests on the self-serving knowledge that we have domesticated all animals” (2011: 65). With domestication the other—all others—fall under an ever-expanding empire of liberalism, one that doesn’t seek to conquer difference outright so much as subsume it, and then tout its own liberal credentials at having restrained itself (Barrett & Barrett 2001). Ultimately, this work is hard won; it is only through the creation of characters that challenge the human that Star Trek is able to reaffirm what the human means. From a broad discomfort with non-humanoid life and an unwillingness to deal with truly radical difference, to the proliferation of technological and hybridized characters, the difference Star Trek seems so keen to elide, hide, and deny always exists at the forefront of the franchise’s narrative. Attention to the show uncomfortable hybrid spaces helps to demonstrate how the human subject around whom the show is centered is in fact highly unstable and contingent on the juxtaposition with and assimilation of the Other. Star Trek does still occasionally challenge; note the “humbling premise” (Pettman, 2011: 247 n30) of the film Star Trek: The Voyage Home (1987), in which a probe visits Earth from deep space to investigate the disappearance of whale song rather than to make contact with humans. There are still hopeful messages in Star Trek, the anthropological machine at play is abstract in its configuration and ungoverned by any real sense of guiding authority (Connolly 2011). It is perhaps an outcome, more than a design feature of the franchise. Despite this willingness to elide difference and treat the human subject with a sense of purity, it is exactly through messy and uneasy interactions with hybrid identities that this purity is achieved (see Bennett 2001; Latour 1993). It is those hybrids and the awesome potential for change they hold that drives the constant reimagining of the human. The more difference that Star Trek presents and works to assimilate, the more apparent it becomes that the human subject against which the rest of the galaxy is to be judged does not really exist at all.
NOTES


2. I term this a ‘recursive’ ideology because it appears that Star Trek leans into an astrofuturistic commitment to the notion that the conquest of (all) space could lead to a utopian future. In truth, the assumption of peace-through-conquest is both self-evidently contradictory, and was already delegitimized in real world geopolitics by the time Star Trek first appeared on the airwaves.

3. The depiction of the various alien species as antagonistic in Star Trek is subject to change throughout the franchise’s runtime but is dealt with here in only the broadest sense.

4. TNG’s “The Chase” canonizes a perverse humanoid creation myth by implying humanoid life was seeded across the galaxy by a forerunner race.

5. Aliens from the Andromeda Galaxy.

6. An insect-like species and significant antagonist in the series.

7. This in contrast to the Soviet paradigm which massively reduced the central responsibilities of the human pilot (Grahn 2009, 88).

8. Historic within the narrative timeline of Star Trek universe.

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ABSTRACT

The plotlines of many science fiction television programs and films establish the identities of the protagonists and antagonists at an early stage of the viewing experience. These boundaries serve to position the viewer on a particular side of the story, rendering it difficult to fully consider the Other’s actions and motivations. It is in this manner that media influences our perceptions of place and social dynamics through a formation of popular geopolitics. In this paper, I present the Cardassians, an extraterrestrial species in Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, as a case study in considering how a re-reading of the shows’ antagonists serves to contextualize the meanings behind being “bad.” I use the Cardassians to explore how a de-villainizing of a science fiction antagonist can lend insight into real-world reconciliation and understandings of those deemed to be the Other.

Key Words: geopolitics; popular geopolitics; Cardassians; empathy; Star Trek

INTRODUCTION

It’s not a good idea to stay too long on a Cardassian border without making your intentions known.
— Jean-Luc Picard, Episode 4x12 (“The Wounded”)

In 1964, Gene Roddenberry finished a science-fiction script with the intent of teaching morality and ethics through the lens of a fantastical voyage, a creation which was later named Star Trek (Alexander 1994; Simon 1999; Gale Research 2016). Star Trek, and a species known as the Cardassians, are the focus of this paper. The Cardassians, recurring characters on Star Trek: The Next Generation (Paramount, 1987-1994) and Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (Paramount, 1993-1999), are somewhat easy for the common viewer to dislike, and even hate. To the protagonists...
of these series, their actions are considered xenophobic, senseless, murderous, and ruthless, and the geographic areas that they inhabit exist in the plot as negative spaces that are embodiments of violence and war. Of particular significance to this assertion are their actions during the Occupation, referring to the Cardassian Union’s half-century military control over the planet Bajor. Cardassian brutality during this occupation was characterized by forced labor, slavery, mass genocide, and exploitation of the planet’s natural environment.

Using the Occupation as an example, even a cursory analysis of the interactions between the Cardassians and the United Federation of Planets reveals similarities to real-world geopolitical interactions between countries across the globe, particularly when we consider the current, often violent, occupations of spaces across the world which include, but are not limited to, Palestine, Kurdistan, and Tibet. These geopolitical interactions are often framed in a binary manner, through a protagonist (whether it be a country, a region, an individual) operating against an antagonist, whose identities shift depending on the media outlet commenting upon the interaction. Media outlets, particularly those with a strong bias such as Fox News, which takes a far-right stance on most issues (Dellavigna et al. 2007), vilifies not only individuals and populations, but the broader geographic areas in which they exist, influencing how viewers construct their internal mental maps of landscapes of violence, and landscapes of peace and safety. Analyzing these cases in simple binary terms, geopolitical media situates antagonist spaces as Othered and detrimental to the welfare of the protagonist’s spaces. Of course, we cannot reduce the impact of geopolitics to geographical and cultural binaries: media geopolitics represent a deeply multifaceted commentary on spaces of perceived danger and, conversely, spaces of perceived safety.

In this paper, I will consider how representations and dialogue surrounding the Cardassians mirror a real-world geopolitical reading of global landscapes of peace and conflict, with attention paid to the role of popular geopolitics in influencing compassion and empathy for the Other. I will begin this paper with an introduction to the science fiction protagonist/antagonist binary as it relates to this research, followed by literary analysis of popular geopolitics and a geopolitics of peace, and then reflect upon the limits to empathy that geopolitically-influenced Othering can present. Then, I will specifically analyze three episodes of Star Trek that display the Cardassians as antagonists to the United Federation of Planets, and use them to argue how an empathic reading of the Cardassians (i.e., an analysis which includes the historical context influencing their current actions) can begin to blur the protagonist/antagonist binary. For each episode, I will provide a brief synopsis of the plot, followed by commentary on how understanding the historical context of the Cardassians serves to blur the protagonist/antagonist binary present when considering these villains. This presents learning opportunities for deconstructing the often harmful, media-influenced geopolitical borders of Planet Earth. The Cardassians are an appropriate example for this type of empathic reading, given their often-violent actions influenced by a tortured past. Further, the Cardassians, much like the races, nationalities, and regions vilified within U.S. popular geopolitical media, occupy a space associated with violence and destruction, but a critical understanding of the historical context of the region reveals a deeper geopolitical interaction far more complicated than “good versus bad.”

THE SCIENCE FICTION ANTAGONIST

Throughout this paper, I consider a protagonist to represent the moral actor within a situation, whose actions are attuned to the well-being and desires of the dominant system. The antagonist, conversely, works directly in opposition to the dominant system. This definition is inspired by the work of Noy
(2017), who studied protagonist/antagonist rhetoric in the context of how museum visitors respond to exhibits that can be emotionally gripping. Popular geopolitics, and more specifically, notions of what it means to be a protagonist or an antagonist, can be heavily influenced by the genre of media that is being consumed. Carter and Dodds (2011), for example, explore how Hollywood’s engagement with 9/11 through the action-thriller genre produces certain types of political sensibilities, particularly in films such as The Kingdom (Universal Pictures 2007) which set up a clear antagonist/protagonist geopolitical binary.

This is also the case within science fiction, whether in the form of film, literature, television, or graphic novels. While it would be a gross simplification to categorize all science fiction as using this binary classification, it can be applied to many of the genre’s most popular works. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation’s show Doctor Who generally outlines the characters/groups that functionally operate as the protagonist and the antagonist within each episode. In the American television series Firefly by executive producer Joss Whedon (20th Century Fox 2002), the Reavers are considered one of the most violent and murderous antagonists that the protagonists, a renegade crew of explorers, of the series face. In the series that I focus on in this paper, Star Trek: The Next Generation and Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, the Cardassians are among many of the antagonists that threaten the welfare of the protagonists of the United Federation of Planets.

POPULAR GEOPOLITICS, BORDERS, AND SCIENCE FICTION

The theoretical focus of this paper lies in the area of popular geopolitics, referring to the “various manifestations to be found within the visual media, news magazines, radio, novels and the Internet” which allow for the “production and circulation of geopolitical theories and perspectives” (Dittmer and Dodds 2008, 441). Popular geopolitics can effectively be studied in conjunction with audience studies as a means of gauging “audience reception towards media representations of geopolitical affairs” (Woon 2014, 660). This echoes Muller’s agency-centered focus on geopolitics, which highlights the power of the individual actor in popular geopolitics: “Much of geopolitical writing starts from the assumption of the autonomous subject who has control over texts, knits them into narratives, and…turns them in a vehicle through which it exercises power. Narratives are here associated with the agency of the subjects as individuals. Individuals produce narratives” (Muller 2008, 328).

While popular geopolitics are often concerned with broader implications of people-media interactions on nation-building, the very premise of popular geopolitics itself is that one individual’s interaction with media should be considered significant, and such interactions build upon themselves to create a community’s interaction with media, a country’s interaction with media, and so on. This hearkens to the philosophy of cosmopolitanism, which places an individual person at the center of a web of humanity, where the actions and thoughts of the individual extend to family, community, region, and the world (Warf 2015). I use the theory of cosmopolitanism, as it relates to popular geopolitics, to highlight the importance of understanding individual viewer responses to television, particularly characters that are considered antagonists, as a way to understand how humans respond to antagonized landscapes and populations of the real world.

Science fiction as a genre can inherently blur the boundaries between a protagonist and their associated antagonist by presenting non-human representations of an individual being. More specifically, science fiction media such as Star Trek can blur the boundaries between what constitutes the soul and body, further blurring what it means to be an individual (Magerstädt 2014). We often see examples of the individual representing a collective in science fiction: consider the Borg and the Q of Star Trek. Both of these
species are populated by individuals who are connected to a greater web of intellectual cohesion, echoing Warf’s (2015) statement on cosmopolitanism and the importance of the individual mind in creating a larger society. These species influence viewers to consider the “criteria of personhood,” as explored through questions presented by Biderman, including “What makes me a person? What is it about me that make[s] me the same person over time?...Even if I know what makes me a person, what makes me me, as opposed to someone else?” (in Sanders 2008, 39). Individuals in these collective webs can also separate from the “hive,” causing serious positive or negative repercussions for the group as a whole. This reinforces the importance of understanding not only the group dynamics of a certain population, but also the individuals that make up these populations. Their significance as individuals can be immense—to understand how places are made, we must understand the everyday geographies of the individuals that inhabit those spaces. Further, as we consider science fiction as a lens through which the protagonist/antagonist divide can be blurred, we can begin to develop commentary on the significance of the individual person within a population. Popular geopolitics often vilifies an entire group as the antagonist, when in reality only the actions of certain members of this group contribute to this oppositional stance.

Linking the importance of studying the actions of the individual as it relates the global geopolitical environment directly to the Cardassians of Star Trek, I argue that each episode of Star Trek creates its own microscale geopolitical environment through its characters, plotlines, and story arcs. I argue that Star Trek writers are seeking to draw connections to real-world geopolitics through the episodes, and the effectiveness of those connections depends upon how well the viewer can tie the plotline of the program to the broader geopolitical environment surrounding the viewer—the geopolitical every day that has been shaped by the media they consume. Put another way, can the viewer connect science fiction politics to those of international geopolitics, drawing similarities between the two? Or a lack of similarities? Each episode that features the Cardassians as antagonists to the Federation represents a broader commentary on the perceived antagonists that present a threat to the well-being of the viewer’s beyond-screen geographical spaces—perhaps emboldening viewers to consider the borders and perceptions that popular geopolitics have influenced in their own lives, regardless of the writers’ original intent for the episode.

Science fiction’s representations of aliens provides commentary on geopolitical notions of borders: aliens force us to consider “the critical fact that the story of the alien is always the story of borders and of the institutional forces that try to neutralize and control those borders in the name of a certain political economy” (Beehler, in Slusser and Rabkin 1987, 26). Geopolitics informs where borders are drawn, and popular geopolitics informs how we perceive those borders, as well as how we view the populations associated with those borders.

Scholars have explored the significant effect of the discourse in the media sources an individual consumes on their opinion of border regions (Holmes 1998; Timothy and Tosun 2003; González-Gómez and Gualda 2016), as well as on geopolitical understandings (Boydston et al. 2010; (Jones et al. 2013; Schuck et al. 2013). We see the same influence in science fiction media: consider Star Trek’s wormhole in Bajoran space that leads from the Alpha Quadrant to the Gamma Quadrant—the protagonists of the series position themselves near this wormhole’s entrance so as to guard it against access by the Cardassians. While the Federation and their allies often view the wormhole as a negative border region through which evil nemeses can cross, what if we consider the wormhole from other points of view? Could the wormhole represent exploration? Or progress? Is the wormhole itself inherently evil? It is the dialogue and discourse that we
consume regarding a border that render it negative or positive in our minds, particularly the discourse that is present in popular geopolitics. This connection between science fiction geopolitics and real-world geopolitical understandings is receiving increased academic attention. Scholars have begun to critically examine popular interest in science fiction antagonists and their connection to real-world, geopolitically-shaped ideas of global antagonists. For example, “following the attacks of 11 September 2001...zombies have become phantasmal stand-ins for Islamist terrorists, illegal immigrants, carriers of foreign contagions, and other ‘dangerous’ border crossers” (Saunders 2012, 81).

A POPULAR GEOPOLITICS OF PEACE

In reviewing the geographic literature pertaining to popular geopolitics, it should be noted that much of the dialogue concentrates on popular geopolitics of violence and war, asking questions such as “Where is the conflict?” and “What has contributed to this violence?” and focusing much of the research on the antagonist/protagonist binary politics of the situation (Most and Starr 1980; Deudney 1983; Geyer 1996; Falah, Flint, and Mamadouh 2006; Sharp 2011). However, there is merit in moving beyond the protagonist/antagonist binary and considering other complicating factors in conflict, such as historical context and the deeper geopolitical complexities of cultural interaction. In doing this, I advocate for using a geopolitics of peace to read and analyze situations of conflict. Geopolitics of peace has been explored by many scholars within and outside of geography (Deudney 1983; Koopman 2011; Megoran 2011; Pumain 2012; McConnell, Megoran, and Williams 2014; Paris 2014). Scholars of geopolitical peace explore many important questions of geopolitical understanding: when we view a landscape through a lens of conflict, by proxy we also learn about peace; for example, if we are discussing insurgent violence in Afghanistan, we indirectly envision geographic areas where such violence is not occurring. However, in these instances, peace is an afterthought, and left “undefined and barely conceptualized...The implication is thus that peace exists only as a point of reference, an empty signifier defined by an absence of violence” (McConnell, Megoran, and Williams 2014, 22). A geopolitics of peace recognizes that multiple narratives and practices of power influence conflict and peace-building, and the lack thereof, accordingly asserting the importance of considering these many influencing factors in a geopolitical analysis. Through such analysis, the protagonist/antagonist binary of conflict is often quick to crumble. In this paper, I analyze the Cardassians through a lens of the geopolitics of peace: what historical factors, cultural interactions, and political influences can provide the viewer with a deeper understanding of, and potentially an empathy for, the actions of the Star Trek antagonist?

DE-VILLAINIZING THE OTHER

The broader intellectual stance of this paper is rooted in gaining empathy for the Other through a lens of the geopolitics of peace, whomever the Other may be as they are represented in the media source at hand. Scholars have grappled with the implications of an uncritical binary (us vs. them) usage of the term. The exact interpretation of whom/what constitutes the “the Other” varies among scholars and some find it problematic to refer to a “singular and amorphous ‘Other’ in geographic scholarship” (Inwood 2013, 721). I echo Inwood’s concerns, and in the case of this research, I do not attempt to define a singular Other. Rather, the Other can represent a more complex relationship than a traditional protagonist/antagonist binary, as I will demonstrate with an extended focus on the Cardassians. Throughout the article, I acknowledge the many narratives and systems of power that define the identity of the Other. I advance notions of a multifaceted, dynamic Other through a process
of de-villainizing, in which I conduct an empathic reading (i.e. an analysis of a group’s current actions through a lens of historical context) of the Cardassians, and suggest ideas for applying this same method to real-world villainized populations. It must also be noted, however, that Star Trek has been criticized for exhibiting liberal color-blindness and unreflective plotlines (O’Connor 2012) throughout much of its existence, and is a viewpoint that must be considered when commenting upon the show’s ability to represent compassionate understandings of the Other.

To de-villainize an individual, species, population, or region, it is important to recognize the significance of knowing the villainized subject’s historical context. Retz (2012) has studied the strong connections between empathy, historical understanding, and social responsibility. Retz notes that students often dismiss the actions of historical figures as illogical and see them as morally inferior to our current society, immediately influencing their own disengagement. Thus, we do not learn from their actions because said actions are dismissed as being the product of a person’s moral inferiority, neglecting the possibility that certain social and/or spatial characteristics influenced their behavior. We can extend this to modern-day villainizing of individuals and groups—often, their historical context is not considered when developing a perception of their actions, allowing them to be cast as the Other, existing as morally opposite. This dichotomy can create an immediate barrier to empathy, lessening the possibility for reconciliation and understanding between the protagonist and their associated antagonist. A de-villainizing of science fiction antagonists, such as the Cardassians, presents an opportunity to use historical context to influence one’s own perceptions of those deemed as Others.

In science fiction, villains are often Othered through their contrast with the protagonists of the plot—the actions and movements of the protagonists are normalized, while the actions and movements of the antagonists are seen as foreign, unnecessary, violent, threatening, or, simply, “bad.” However, we know that these relationships are often complex, and many science fiction works disrupt the protagonist/antagonist binary: for example, a brief analysis of the Ferengi, a humanoid extraterrestrial race from Star Trek, presents an opportunity to de-villainize an established science fiction antagonist through acknowledgment and awareness of the social and cultural spaces and conditions in which their race exists. I offer this example as a precursor to the focus of the paper, a de-villainizing of the Cardassians.

In many episodes featuring the Ferengi, the viewer learns that their culture is heavily driven by financial gain and profit, often achieved through actions of dishonesty and swindling of those with whom they conduct business. Sexuality, misogyny, and forced sex labor have also been associated with the Ferengi race in Star Trek. Much of the Ferengi culture is displayed through Quark, the charismatic, yet often conniving host of “Quark’s Bar” in Deep Space Nine’s Promenade (a commercial area at the center of Deep Space Nine which serves as a core for social activities). Quark’s actions often problematic business actions can cast him (and perhaps the Ferengi race more broadly) in a negative light for viewers, but his status as an antagonist becomes blurry when he (albeit rarely) engages in activities for the betterment of Deep Space Nine as a whole, such as negotiating compassionate business deals for individuals in need. Although these positive actions are rare for Quark, when the viewer considers aspects of Ferengi culture itself, it lends insight into why and how he operates this way.

A de-villainizing of the Ferengi can offer insight into how viewers form notions of characters in a show: the Ferengi as a whole are often portrayed through their obsession with money and rampant misogyny. However, Quark’s actions often disrupt this understanding, blurring the perception of the Ferengi as a true antagonist within the show. Connecting this to the Cardassians, an empathic reading of the villainized extraterrestrial species, even if it is through
individual representatives of the species, can present a unique opportunity to learn about gaining empathy for an Othered population, and can potentially influence a viewer to consider empathy for Others beyond the screen (see, e.g., Chory-Assad and Cicchirillo 2005; Hunt 2006; Greitemeyer, Osswald, and Brauer 2010; Yeager 2010; Rutkowski et al. 2011; Oliver et al. 2012; Bal and Veltkamp 2013; Cummins and Cui 2014; Hutton and Mak 2014). Collectively, viewers who consider the multiple narratives surrounding the actions of an antagonist construct a broader popular geopolitics of empathy associated with the television show, which I argue could translate into empathic readings of real-world individuals and populations deemed as antagonists.

Science fiction, including *Star Trek*, is a highly appropriate genre in which to study empathy. Nicholls described the importance of science fiction in forming commentary on the real world through its use of metaphor to describe reality, urging us to read beyond the superficial meanings: “To read it literally is not to hear its profoundest and most disturbing reverberations” (Nicholls 1976, 8). While Nicholls was referring to written science fiction, the same notions can apply to visual forms as well. Science fiction media facilitates emotional connections between the viewer and the subject based on its describing of reality through a lens of fantasy (Lips 1990; Piana 2002; Landon 2011; Chapman 2013; Tapper 2014). Through their research, these scholars demonstrate that, although many fantastical works depict non-existent landscapes and species, these depictions are often poignantly related to real-world issues and populations. Film and visual culture more generally has been “credited with considerable capacity to shape prevailing understandings of people and places” (Carter and Dodds 2014, 57). Such fantastical plotlines and themes often estrange the viewer from their preconceived understandings of historical events, figures, and socio-cultural dynamics, creating a new lens through which the subject matter can be interpreted.

**DE-VILLAINIZING THE CARDASSIANS**

The Cardassians are an established villain of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*: ruthless, xenophobic, and violent, they are considered one of the notable enemies of the Klingon Empire and the United Federation of Planets. They are known to torture their prisoners for information, accept bribes in return for discounting questionable occurrences, and are seen by most members of the Alpha Quadrant as ruthless killers.

Thus, the Cardassians are undoubtedly science fiction antagonists, ruthless in their actions and demeanor. However, understanding of their history lends the viewer insight into their current actions. Cardassian society was once known as the Hebitian civilization, occupants of the planet Cardassia Prime, known for fine art and beautiful architecture. However, due to strain caused by decline of the planet’s natural resources, the Hebitian civilization disintegrated, causing millions of its members to starve, almost driving the population to extinction. Surviving members of the society turned to military action and exploration to perpetuate the continuation of their species, commencing the Cardassian expansion into the Milky Way Galaxy (documented in episodes *TNG*: “Chain of Command, Part II”; *DS9*: “Duet”).

It is through this historical understanding that we see that the Cardassians’ military exploration (and associated ruthlessness) came from a state of desperation: it was only after the virtual collapse of their species that surviving members turned to violence. This historical context is not only crucial to understanding the actions of the Cardassians, but also significant in demonstrating why historical context is important when considering the actions of any “villainized” group. If we are to see the Cardassians as acting in a negative manner that results from desolation and a destruction of their natural resources, perhaps we can extend the metaphor to human groups who are villainized due to their...
daily actions and/or their race, gender, ethnicity, or class. Unfortunately, popular news media, as well as purveyors of fake news, regularly villainize certain individuals or geographic regions without reference to any geographic, historical, economic, political, or cultural context that could help us understand their actions. Science fiction, and particularly this example of the Cardassians of Star Trek, can teach viewers the importance of seeking out the historical context of the actions of the Other.

A further example of de-villainizing the Cardassians comes from Episode 2x05 from Deep Space Nine, titled “Cardassians.” In this episode, a young Bajoran child (who visually appears to be Cardassian, but is being raised by a Bajoran father) physically attacks Garak, a Cardassian exile who lives on Deep Space Nine. Doctor Bashir, the physician of Deep Space Nine, speculates that the boy has most likely been raised to fear, or perhaps even hate, the Cardassians. Throughout the episode, the viewer learns that the boy’s story is deeply complicated and extends significantly further than a simple adoption by a Bajoran man. By the end of the episode, the viewer learns that the child has been the victim of illegal Cardassian smuggling, orchestrated by Gul Dukat, a Cardassian military officer who wished to humiliate the Cardassian politician Kotan Pa’Dar. The young child, phenotypically and genetically Cardassian, is the son of Pa’Dar, but has been raised by a Bajoran man who likely passed on knowledge of the violence committed by the Cardassians to his son. Even the most casual viewer may come away from this episode with contempt for Dukat, but feel mercy for the young boy, since his dislike of the Cardassians stems from a long process of betrayal, displacement, and social conditioning. While dislike for Dukat is entirely fair, the young boy’s convoluted history could present an opportunity for the viewer to consider the Cardassian’s complicated political and social history when viewing these interactions with young Cardassians. This is not to say that the viewer will condone and support the actions of Dukat, but rather can understand the social conditions influencing his actions, blurring his role as an antagonist within this episode.

A final example of empathy building is “The Chase” (Épisode 6x20 of The Next Generation), which focuses on the search for pieces of an early genetic puzzle that may provide evidence of the origin of life in the Alpha Quadrant. This search is supported by the Federation (the United Federation of Planets, to which Starfleet belongs), Klingons, Romulans, and Cardassians (all extraterrestrial races). The search ends at the final planet, Vilmor II, where members of the party wish to take tricorder measurements of lichen growing on a rock face. Once readings of the lichen are taken and input into a computer program, the program triggers a holographic message that shows a humanoid explaining that all life in the Alpha Quadrant comes from a common origin—from the humanoids, who once lived in the galaxy alone before any other life forms were developed. They scattered their genetic material to other planets, hoping to create a broader population of humanoids. The hologram then states that knowledge of a common ancestor will hopefully lead towards peace. However, the Cardassians, having considered themselves to be superior beings, are angry at such a discovery. We can revisit the aforementioned discussion of Cardassian history and how such elitism developed—out of a sense of desperation. Their perceived superiority was essentially developed as a coping mechanism in dealing with the destruction of their own planet. In episodes such as “The Chase,” it is important to have historical context in order to truly understand the reactions of the Cardassians to this DNA discovery.

While this is my own empathic reading of the Cardassians, I encourage readers to conduct their own de-villainizing not only of antagonists within fictional tales, but also of antagonists that exists in their real-world geography. Carter and Dodds discussed how film plotlines, particularly those representing a conflict, often do not “provide a clear

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sense of the wider geopolitical conflict…” (Carter and Dodds 2015, 58), presenting a possible barrier to empathy as the Other is contextualized as morally separate from the protagonist. However, in cases where filmmakers include the geopolitical and historical contexts influencing the Other within the storytelling, the protagonist/antagonist dichotomy can become blurred. A blurring of this dichotomy can lend itself to empathy for the portrayed Other, which arguably can lead to an overall dissolution of the artificially created boundaries between Us and the Other, at a viewer-by-viewer level.

THOUGHTS FOR MOVING FORWARD

In this paper, I do not attempt to argue that considering the background and social upbringing of an antagonist renders their actions excusable and unpunishable. Nor do I suggest that in all viewing situations, empathizing with a science fiction character will translate into the viewer’s daily life, allowing them to empathize with the actions of an individual or group considered to be a “real-life antagonist,” whose identity is often shaped by international geopolitics. The myriad spaces of social injustice in modern society cannot be completely eradicated by my call to consider empathy towards villainized science fiction characters. However, in moving forward, it is important to consider the ramifications of viewer-level increases in empathy towards Othered individuals and populations, particularly when we consider the importance of individual affect within forming a broader emotional community (see cosmopolitanism in Warf (2010)).

Contrarian theories must be acknowledged and considered in this research. Scholars have questioned whether media can truly influence and create empathy, or if highly empathic people are consuming the media already, therefore more likely to have an empathic response to the subject material (Bal and Veltkamp 2013). Are viewers of Star Trek more likely to be empathic individuals regardless of their viewing habits, and certain episodes elicit this empathy? Would a person less capable of feeling empathy have a different response to the same episodes? While these are valid remarks to consider, it does not negate the importance of this research. There is real value in exploring how media programs such as Star Trek can elicit empathic responses towards Othered individuals, particularly when scholars such as Rutkowski et al. (2011) have used brain-computer and machine interactive interfacing studies to suggest a strong connection between a broadcasted emotional stimulation and empathic user responses shown in the brain. For future researchers, it would be intellectually lucrative to employ longitudinal studies on the responses of viewers to Star Trek and their perceived empathic responses to Othered subjects in the storylines, considering the aforementioned academic literature that supports the connection between media and empathy development.

Given creator Gene Roddenberry’s gumption for tackling (often with a liberal focus) many political and social themes in Star Trek (O’Connor 2012), the highlighted episodes were written in a manner consistent with Roddenberry’s political motives, and put forth a message of compassion for Othered individuals and groups. As active consumers, viewers of Star Trek can decide to agree or disagree with the actions of the Cardassians, but more importantly, coming to such a decision requires a deeper understanding of the many narratives that define what it means to be an antagonist. As we navigate a political climate dominated by highly fractured media representations of perceived antagonists, it is important that the individual consumers of media sources consider a deeper engagement with the history of all actors involved in a geopolitical situation. As I have shown, Star Trek offers us a venue in which to practice this de-villainizing, and it is my hopes as the author that I may inspire readers to consider not only a de-villainizing of the Cardassians, but also a de-villainizing of the antagonists in their own geopolitical spheres.
NOTES

1. In *Star Trek*, the Alpha and Gamma Quadrants refer to quadrants of the Milky Way Galaxy. The galaxy is split into the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta Quadrants. The Bajoran are an extraterrestrial species native to the planet Bajor, located in the Alpha Quadrant.

2. All information can be found at [http://memory-alpha.wikia.com/wiki/Cardasian].

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REFERENCES


Blurring the Protagonist/Antagonist Binary through a Geopolitics of Peace


