

Humour

Postcolonial
Interventions

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‘This world was unified, first of all, by a common purpose: to provide the corrective of laughter and criticism to all existing straightforward genres, languages, styles, voices, to force men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured in them.’

- Mikhail Bakhtin

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Editors' Note

These are not laughing times. As this issue is prepared more and more Kashmiris are dying like flies, bewildered children are being separated from their parents across American borders, Palestine continues to be ravaged by Israeli atrocities and across India, different forms of macabre hatred continue to simmer, burst and crystallise on the streets, within homes and across digital platforms, all in the name of nation, religion and patriotism. An international survey has also declared India to be most unsafe for women. These are certainly not laughing times. So why this issue on postcolonial humour? The fact is that in times of despair, when forces of destruction and chaos run rampant, when indignation and attempts at consolidated resistance seem futile, when the very quest

for truth becomes mired in self-defeating scepticism, a loud guffaw might well be the last resort for those who seek to resist. Across time and space, satire, mockery and even self-deflating laughter has again and again been used by authors and artists to either expose the ridiculousness of those who deem themselves great or to dispel the aura of fear that power generates or to make us smilingly aware of our own inadequacies.

This is particularly relevant in the current context of the subcontinent because unlike developed democracies, where Presidents and Prime Ministers are regularly spoofed on prime time media to the delight of many, political satire and mocking laughter, directed powerful individuals or institutions often incite unchecked violence that might put one's very survival at stake. Yet artists keep on trying to laugh and to make others laugh as laughter also creates a community of feeling, a sense of solidarity which becomes vital in times of fear and despair. And academics such as ourselves who find our lives, endeavours and aspirations constricted by ever-multiplying regulations of arbitrary bureaucrats and non-academic politicians, practising laughter is essential to keep our existential crises at bay.

The issue includes six major articles and a book review, including four that are directly related to the thematic focus of the issue, and two that are of more general interest. The journey begins with Dr. Sukriti Ghosal's

extensive survey of the significance of humour in post-colonial literature and is followed by papers on stand up comedy and its political ramifications, the nonsense verse of Sukumar Roy and jokes in the context of post-colonial Cuba. The two general papers focus on discrimination and stereotyping faced by Arabs in the West and feminist concerns in the context of African postcolonial literature. The review is a particularly interesting one which focuses on experiences migrant students, including Indian students in Australia.

A sincere thanks to all our contributors and associates, including those who only register their presence in silence, for making this issue possible and for keeping the laughter alive.

Dismissing with a Smile: Postcolonial Comic Subversion

Sukriti Ghosal

Postcolonialism may be described as a dynamic discourse that not only critiques colonizer's version of the colonized but also tries to interrogate it, subvert it, and even replace it with a view to asserting the unique identity of the colonized community before and/or after the independence. As colonial ideology is an ideology that assumes the centrality of the colonizer and, *ipso facto* the marginalized state of the colonized, Postcolonialism tries to re-configure the power relation by centralizing whatever had been treated as Other in the Centre-Other binary. It is not a monolithic discourse, nor is it the brainchild of a single theorist who designed the entire structure of this multi-layered edifice in all its diverse

ramifications. If Frantz Fanon punctured the missionary myth by exposing the evils of colonial subjugation, it was Edward Said who unmasked the conspiratorial design of colonial ideology that sought to legitimize Western domination over more than three-fourths of the inhabited territory of the globe. Said revealed how the racial superiority of the Europeans was negatively constructed by strategic misrepresentation of the Orient, by spreading canards about the passion, prejudice, superstition and savagery of the native inhabitants of the colonies.

Originally an overtly political worldview, Postcolonialism has spread to the field of culture as it is always the native culture that bears the brunt of imperial domination. Since colonialism is as much political as cultural, all components of culture—language, history, myth etc.—having any relation to the issue of domination and resistance come under the purview of Postcolonial discourse. Any text that is planned to undermine an authoritative discourse constructed to legitimize hegemony may be designated a Postcolonial text. In order to counter biased judgment of the imperialists, Postcolonialism promotes re-examination of canons and valorization of native textual output. In their concluding chapter of *The Empire Writes Back*, ‘More english than English’, Ashcroft et al have mapped the “process of literary decolonization” which involves “a radical dismantling of the European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses” (Ashcroft, Grif-

fiths and Tiffin 2002, 220). As construction of self-image is also a repudiation of the imperial version, Postcolonialism addresses the question of identity and self-determination. Since the language of the imperialists was imposed on the native people almost everywhere in the colonies, Postcolonialism tries to find out how language becomes a resistance-site for the colonized, how they try to reject, replace, distort, adapt and even creolize the language of the colonizer. The colonizers by and large are proud of the purity of their ethno-cultural identity. Therefore, as part of resistance strategy, Postcolonialism glorifies hybridity which makes the identity of both the colonizer and the colonized rather ambiguous and ambivalent.

Postcolonialism also addresses several other related issues about domination, disempowerment and disavowal of authority. T. Vijaya Kumar objects to the use of hyphen in the word 'Postcolonial' which, in his opinion, splits the word and defers interrogation of colonial history and its legacy (Kumar 1996, 196). Robert Young problematizes the Postcolonial discourse by hierarchizing the Other, by showing that India has enjoyed brighter footlight of attention than Africa in Postcolonial studies: "In comparison to the extensive work done on India, meanwhile, Africa remains comparatively neglected... today India quite clearly retains that position of pride of place, the jewel in the crown of colonial-discourse analysis" (Young 1995, 165-66). Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak contends that subaltern voice, because it is re-presented, continues to be muted, or even when articulate, remains unheard: “the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject...will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (Spivak 1994, 90). As colonization is about domination and exertion of power, all issues from national identity formed through negotiation with the colonizer to the issue of Western universalist version of gender-based marginalization are treated as veritable Postcolonial issues. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, has faulted Western feminist discourse for looking upon all women of the globe as a homogeneous community to the utter oblivion of other parameters of discrimination like race, class and caste. For ignoring the “material and historical heterogeneities” of the experiences of Third World women, the image that has emerged is “an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse” (Mohanty 1995, 242).

Leela Gandhi calls Postcolonialism “a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of ...interrogating the colonial past” (Gandhi 1998, 4). Harish Trivedi has established that one meaning of the prefix ‘post-’ in Postcolonialism is *repudiatory* (three others being *after*, *later*,

higher) (Trivedi 1996, 126). Robert J.C. Young also has this sense in mind when he defines Postcolonialism from the point of view social activism that is “both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice” (Young 2016, 58). Protest and resistance in any form are, therefore, considered the hallmark of Postcolonialism. The focus of Postcolonial discourse is less on the colonizer but more on the colonized. How the people of the colonies were subjugated and compelled to cooperate with the subjugators, how their pre-colonial identity and indigenous culture got gradually erased, the colonial hangover they have been experiencing even after independence and the modes of protest against this unwanted imposition – all these figure in Postcolonial discourse. Homi Bhabha has re-defined the colonizer-colonized relation and shown that due to prolonged contactual co-existence, the relation has mutated during the period of colonial subjugation. Bhabha recognizes the interdependence of the colonizer and the colonized and shows how the binary between Ourselves and Others disappears in the Third Space.

Ever since the publication of the English translation of Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World* (1968), carnivalesque has become a buzz word for cultural criticism. It has become so fashionable that in recent past Kolkata witnessed the staging of a play *Bakhtin Bakhtin* in which the eponymous protagonist keeps a musical band suggestively named ‘Carnival’ – its songs used for the carnivalesque

purpose of authority-baiting. Bakhtin used the term carnivalesque to describe the various aspects of comic topsy-turvy of social order in medieval Europe and how its spirit found its articulation in the writings of the French novelist Francois Rabelais (1532-1564). In order probably to rebel against the monologism of discourse in contemporary Russia that had tried to asphyxiate free thinking, Bakhtin stressed the importance dialogism in discourse. The essence of dialogism is neutralization voice-centrality through heteroglossia/ polyphony, through creation of diversity of voices. If Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogism' and 'heteroglossia' creates space for plurality of voices, his notion of carnivalesque makes us aware of the subtle strategy of subversion of dominant discourse. In *Torn Halves* Robert Young has rightly observed, "Bakhtin found dialogism embodied in carnival" (Young 1996, 49). The term carnivalesque has struck root in Postcolonial discourse and is used to describe programmatic subversion of prescribed hierarchies by foregrounding the subaltern.

Power in its positive sense means the ability to act and in its negative sense implies capacity to exert control. In the latter sense it is an instrument of subjugation. Foucauldian notion of power is that power should not be mistaken for a single source of domination; it is but a multi-pronged instrument of attack that manifests itself through all forms of social relationship. To quote Foucault: "power must be understood in the first in-

stance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization... Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978, 92-93). As power always thrives by subjugating others, power in any form is to be resisted to create a space for identity, individual or racial. Foucault who has written elaborately on power, its source and its various modes of operation justly maintains that in every society norms that govern life are set by those who wield power. Realignment of power structure calls for infraction of socially recommended codes. Peter Stallybrass & Allon White who in their scholarly book *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression* have explored the issues of limit and transgression, have shown that since transgression re-structures the alignment of power, wherever there is dominance, there is transgression. It may be Faustian which is confrontational or carnivalesque which is comically subversive. The holi in India is an occasion for comic transgression when social hierarchies are suspended and for sheer diversion at other's expense people can taint others' face and dress without having any fear of chastisement. In a very interesting article 'The Pleasure of the Carnavalesque: Performing the Rituals during *Shiv Gajan*' Sayanti Mondal has written on the “carnavalesque quotient” of the gajan festival of Bengal. Held annually at the end of the Bengali year, it is a carnivalesque moment for boundary-crossing without being offensive. It is an occasion for unbounded revelry

involving the sacred and the profane. During the festival, body-centric acts having mystic nuances like skin-piercing, walking barefoot upon burning embers, jumping on thorn-bed, are indulged in. The underprivileged lower caste people who in other time debarred from entering the temple, can participate in fasting and penance and become *sannyasi*, a role that temporarily upgrades them socially, for even the upper caste Brahmins find them venerable for those days.

In the Middle Ages, carnival was an occasion for playing Go as You Like at the social sphere. Restrictions suspended for a while, people could indulge in activity which at other times would be considered a transgression. It was a time for clowns mimicking kings, a time for casting off all tokens of so called civilized manners. Drunkenness and sensual indulgence replaced sobriety and abstinence as norm and un-sophisticated revelry would not be objected to or frowned upon. Three principal characteristics of the carnivalesque are odd coupling that disregards social hierarchy (say, the Owl marrying the Pussy Cat in Edward Lear's poem), facetious eccentricity that is considered inappropriate behavior, and misalliance or assortment of mutually exclusive elements. Incidentally, Bakhtin has shown that up to the Middle Ages both the official (sophisticated) and the carnival (sensual) aspects of human life were accepted as normal: "Both these lives were legitimate but separated by strict temporal boundaries" (Bakhtin 1984, 130). So-

ciety even created space for shifting from one to the other during the carnival period – a time for crowning the pauper and hurling darts of jibes with impunity at the respectable. But this scope was gradually restricted and this resulted in the compartmentalization of the profane and the pure, the prohibited and the permitted. In order to isolate the comic, it was branded as ‘folk’ which implies that it was not considered part of the mainstream which represented the voice of the authority. This ghettoization of the ribald is evident from the Renaissance exclusivist theory of beauty which would not concede any space to the disagreeable. The carnival offers an alternative aesthetic theory by approving body-centric activity like nose-blowing, belching, farting, defecation heretofore not considered very civilized or dignified. It has been argued that the carnival was an occasion for ‘ritualized transgression’ – a temporary connivance at social barriers than real dissolution of the invisible border of demarcation. This view has found voice in Terry Eagleton’s safety-valve theory which refers to the rather conservative function of the carnivalesque: “Carnival after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art” (Eagleton 1981, 148). In short, by allowing some degree of transgression for a specified period of time, the carnivalesque indulgence blunts the real zeal to overthrow the system that enchains and degrades.

Even if this be true, Postcolonial discourse seeks to examine how this limited freedom for crossing the boundary has been used for the purpose of resistance – for railing at any type of hegemonic power. Protest against domination is not confined to politics only, nor does it always manifest itself in the form of organized activism under party banner. Sometimes the very reflection that the oppressor should be confronted takes the form of a protest. For example, in ‘The Naked King’ the Bengali poet Nirendranath Chakrabarty ridicules the spinelessness of the cringing sycophants who clap in praise of the obscene spectacle of the king’s nakedness. The speaker laments that the outspoken child who can face the king and ask ‘Hey, where are your clothes, king?’ is missing. There is a touch of the Postcolonial subversive comic in the lines where the poet sneers at the slavish, obsequious attitude of the flatterers who even obligingly try to justify the shameless show by saying that the king has put on a costly dress which is invisible because it is super-fine. There are various social acts and festivities which embody remonstrance against cultural domination and hence are Postcolonial in character. In his article ‘Between Elite Hysteria and Subaltern Carnavalesque: The Politics of Street-food in the City of Calcutta’ Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay, for example, has shown how as part of ‘civilizing process’ certain food items were expurgated from the Bengali palate. Subsequently how as part of counter-hegemonic cultural enterprise which may be described as the ‘return of the repressed’ (Mukhopadhyay

2004, 47), these re-incarnated in streetfood (read *fuchka*) not only to add to gastronomic pleasure but to assert as it were the triumph of subalternity. Often an odd dress or similar other cultural symbols are used for the purpose of subversion. In the forties of the twentieth century, zoot suit, a type of male dress with excesses of cloth and sartorial intricacy which gave a comic touch to the look of the wearer, emerged as a symbol of Mexican identity. No wonder that Luis Valdez uses the dress name as the title of one of his resistant plays written to assert Chicano cultural identity against American domination. Interrogating the ethnic stereotypes framed by the imperialists can also be a form of Postcolonial resistance. For example, in his play *Bandido* Luis Valdez uses the character of Tiburcio Vásquez, negatively stereotyped by the Americans as a notorious bandit, for deconstructing the hegemonic myth about the benevolent outlaw.

All these modes of subversion are no doubt powerful, but the most effective mode in Postcolonial context, a context of asymmetric power equation, seems to be the art of comic disruption. This is because in a situation involving domination and subjugation, the dominated usually avoid confrontational resistance for which matching vigour is required. They nevertheless register their protest through satiric laughter. The advantage of laughter is that what cannot be dislodged by force can be laughed at, which is why laughter is also a form of resistance, an effective means of dismissal of author-

ity. Incidentally laughter is a typically human response to a grotesque spectacle, incident or remark. It is human because only man is capable of distinguishing between norm and absence of norm. Without this distinctive acumen it is impossible to respond to a tickling joke, a ludicrous event or a hilarious situation, say Mrs Hardcastle mistaking her own husband for a notorious highwayman in *She Stoops to Conquer*, or Cecily in *The Importance of Being Earnest* talking about her engagement, separation and reconciliation as per code of romantic love even before meeting her lover. Although when we laugh we invariably laugh at somebody, Umberto Eco distinguishes between comic laughter (a decrepit woman using make-up) and humorous laughter (Don Quixote unable to understand that chivalric ideals have become dated): “In comedy, we laugh at the character. In humor, we smile because of the contradiction between the character and the frame the character cannot comply with. But we are no longer sure that it is the character who is at fault. Maybe the frame is wrong” (Eco 1984, 8). In short, Umberto Eco thinks that although both the types of laughter involve criticism, in humour it is directed not towards an individual but at the frame. Since laughter issues from detection of deviation from norm and since norms are set by those who wield power, laughter is defiant by its very nature. The stronger form of resistant laughter manifests itself in the form of satire. But as it is unsparing and iconoclastic, only the powerful can use it against the oppressor. What is left to those who are at

the receiving end in the structure of power, is humour and irony. Humour and irony gain in nuance what satire gains in vigour. Hence although less caustic than satire these are broader in scope. In their introduction to the authoritative edited volume *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, Reichl and Stein have justly maintained that 'laughter is a central element, humour a key feature, disrespect a vital textual strategy of Postcolonial cultural practice' (Reichl and Stein 2005, 1).

During the period of colonial rule in India, cartoonists explored their skills to comically undermine the western values and ways of life. Under the nom de plume "Bambooque" Wilayat Ali (1885-1918) caricatured foot-licking *jeebhujurs* and the "England Returned" Indians who would abhor their vernacular and boast of having completely forgotten their mother tongue for having stayed abroad just for a few months. The cartoonist's butt of attack was no doubt the elite Indian hobnobbing with the colonial rulers. But what accounts for the Postcolonial significance of the cartoons is that this weakness for the British culture in preference to one's own struck the cartoonist as a reprehensible fault. Not in painting alone, in literature also the stooges of the authority figure are often sharply travestied. In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* one of the ministers of the despotic Ruler dreams of wielding absolute power like his master. His notion of absolute dictatorial power has been exposed in a humorous vein "Oh, imagine it: when you say, Wipe

your noses, a million handkerchiefs are raised to a million noses” (Thiongo’ 2007, 414). The fearful network of totalitarian repressive machinery has been unmasked in the novel in a style that is literally facetious. For example, one of the ministers is sent abroad for surgical enlargement of eye so that no enemy can be lie beyond the ken of surveillance; another is to undergo ear-surgery which is expected to broaden the range of hearing so that no conspiratorial whisper can escape unheard.

Since colonialism caused dispersal of the seeds of culture, the location of culture needs to be traced to the metamorphosed incarnations of those seeds. In tracing it, Bhabha talks about the hybridized state of Postcolonial culture and the ambivalence in the relationship of the colonizer & the colonized. Ambivalence helps us distinguish between the ethnic identity which is deterministically closed and the vibrant cultural identity which evolves through interface between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer encourages the subject to mimic the master in expectation that in the process the traces of the subject’s indigenous self will gradually get purged. But as any re-production involves invariable departure from the original in some contours—it is ‘almost the same but not quite’ (Bhabha 1994, 86)—mimicry begets mockery and the original form gets caricatured in its replication. Bhabha, therefore, categorizes mimicry as ‘at once resemblance and menace’ (Ibid) and justly observes that “the menace of mimicry is its double

vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 1994, 87). The colonizer wants a mimic man but what happens is just the opposite. Narcissism becomes counterproductive, for the new figure proves not to be a clone but a parody of the original. It is a threat to the colonizer as in it he finds his own identity degraded, which was the least he intended at the time of cloning his self-image. It is precisely for this reason that in Postcolonial Studies Ashcroft et al have maintained that Mimicry “locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviours of the colonized” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2013, 155).

Small wonder that in Postcolonial studies mimicry which operates through comic disfigurement, is a favourite strategy of subversion. Incidentally, in judging mimicry one must not lose sight of its bi-focality, the doubleness of perspective which may operate on three levels: 1) the mimic’s identity, what one thinks oneself to be and what one appears to others; 2) what the colonizer wants a mimic to be and what it actually turns out to be; 3) what the author’s attitude to the mimic is – whether the mimic is projected as an inferior clown or a Frankenstein empowered to cross the boundary set by the master. The points may be examined in the light Khushwant Singh’s short story “Karma”, a story about the discomfiture of Sir Mohan, a snobbish Indian who maintains distance from his countrymen to impress everybody as a model

sahib. Educated in England, he has picked up the external tokens of colonial culture – he rarely speaks Hindustani, speaks good English in British accent, wears a Balliol tie, smokes English cigarettes, sips only Scotch and reads no newspaper but *The Times*. Khushwant in his inimitable serio-comic style shows that although Sir Mohan projects himself as a British clone, he is miles away from the pattern he treats as ideal and on which he models himself. At the railway station the two English soldiers are not at all impressed by his words “I say, I say surely”. Although pronounced in Oxford accent, the words ‘almost sounded like English’ to their ears. What Sir Mohan values as self-worth, strike the two soldiers as odd, as clear from Khushwant’s dismissive qualifier ‘almost’. Sir Mohan fails to keep in mind that “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English’ (Bhabha 1994, 87). Sir Mohan may be proud of his Anglicized self which he thinks is a flawless replica of the master’s self, but he impresses the British soldiers as nothing better than a buffoon. This illustrates the first type of bi-focality of mimicry. The second level of bi-focality is the ironic reversal of intention which makes mimicry a menace. This is best illustrated by Caliban’s words to Prospero:

You taught me language; and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language (*The Tempest* 1.2. 364-
66)

When the English officially promoted the study of English in India, the professed aim was to create a body of ‘interpreters’, who, as Macaulay envisaged it, would be “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 1835). In Khushwant’s story, the British soldiers, despite the impeccable English of Sir Mohan, look upon him as a ‘nigger’ who is unfit to be a co-traveller. So they command him: “Ek dam jao – get out” (Singh 2010). When the soldiers start flinging his suitcase, his thermo flask, his briefcase on to the platform, Sir Mohan can tolerate no more. In his fury, he shouts a threat at them: ‘I’ll have you arrested – guard, guard!’ (Ibid). This “was too much of the King’s (English) for them” (Ibid). As imperial programming has failed, as the mimic behavior has gone beyond the master’s control, one of them slaps him on the face and then the soldiers together push him out of the compartment. The third level of this doubleness of perspective is the author’s attitude to the mimic and his role. It is here that the Postcolonial significance of the text most strongly felt. At the end of Khushwant’s story we find Sir Mohan’s wife spitting betel saliva through the window of the running train while Sir Mohan stands stupefied on the platform. This helps us grasp Khushwant’s attitude to the mimic which is admittedly an attitude of derisive disapproval. The same negative attitude marks the style of writers who make fun of Baboo English and Butler English. One example of each type given by Jagadisan and Ali is worth quot-

ing: “Hoping to have the honour of throwing myself at your goodness’s philanthropic feet” (Jagadisan and Ali 2004, 38); “off the fan” (Jagadisan and Ali 2004, 39). The amusement is mostly always at the expense of the subject using the language. But in most Postcolonial texts the author also tacitly approves the distortion and sides with the distorter. In such cases, appropriation of the master’s tongue becomes a mode of writing back, which makes the centre’s power of control somewhat uncertain. In *The God of Small Things*, for example, the twins Estha and Rahel refuse to co-operate with the family desperate to domesticate them in the name of good grooming. But being children they cannot straightforwardly go against the elders of the family who behave as imperial subjugators. They register their defiance in a number of amusing ways like reading a story book (*The Adventures of Susie Squirrel*) backwards. This worries their tutor Miss Mitten who remarks that she has seen “Satan in their eyes”. But even this cannot stop them, for they immediately invert the order of letters in the individual words of the phrase “nataS ni rieht seye” (Roy 1998, 60). It is obvious that Roy sides with Estha and Rahel and, instead of faulting their learning skill, she appreciates their clever art of subversion.

Postcolonial studies celebrate ambivalence of identity as it weakens the grip of domination and creates a space for resistance. In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy critiques the Western cultural invasion in a passage

that deals with the issue of ambivalent identity. Having watched the classic film *The Sound of Music* at Abhilash Talkies, Estha and Rahel self-critically reflect on their own peccadilloes. The twins, who have been taught to idealize Western manners, cannot decide whether shivering legs, blowing spit bubbles or gobbling (Roy 1998, 106) which they like so much would qualify as acceptable manners by European standard, represented by the children of the film and Sophie Mol. While their anxiety makes us laugh, it also makes us aware how Postcolonial identity can be constructed through indulgence in what is forbidden. In *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World*, R. G Khanduri mentions another form of ambivalent identity that played its role in embarrassing the colonizers. Political cartoons drawn under British tutelage in the pre-independent period created an ambivalent identity of the cartoonist for the rulers. Even when the authority was the target, the colonizers could not help being indifferent to the art of subversion because of this ambivalent identity. The cartoonist must be accepted either as an imitator or an inventor. If recognized as imitator, it would be wrong to punish the cartoonist, for he is just a replicator. On the other hand, to accept him as an inventor would be to indirectly acknowledge the creativity of the native. Once this is done, the native would move from the periphery to the centre and all the colonial myth of native backwardness together with the so called civilizing mission of the colonizer would collapse inevitably.

One mode of Postcolonial resistance is inversion which consists in the strategy of turning an authority symbol upside down. Unlike subversion which aims at dismantling the centre-other binary, inversion carnivalesquely reverses the role of the dominator and the dominated: the king falls upon his knees before a beggar or the master carries his servant on his shoulder. In Satyajit Ray's short story 'Asamanjababur Kukur' ('The Dog of Asamanjababu', first published in Bengali in *Sharadiya Sandesh* in 1978) there is an excellent use of the trope of inversion. In the story Asamanjababu delights in equating the English with the dog-species and wants to own a dog to be the master of one who can follow commands given in English. He chooses an English name, 'Brownie', for an extraordinary dog that he owns. Brownie is a dog with superior intelligence and can critically recognize each deviation from the norm which is the source of laughter. There is a comic role-reversal in the way the dog reacts to every incident involving human embarrassment – someone slipping on to the floor from a broken chair, curd spilling accidentally from a curd-pot, an umbrella getting blown off by storm or words getting stuck in the mouth of a stutterer. Each of these amuses Brownie and elicits a response in the form of laughter that ranges from giggle to guffaw. The height of sarcasm is reached at the end of the story when the dog bursts into sardonic laughter at the proposal of an American who, under the stupid impression that everything is purchasable, offers money to buy the dog.

Bhabha prefers hybridity to inversion as a Postcolonial strategy of resistance. Mimicry no doubt is a stronger mode of protest than inversion because it makes the colonizer's self-image unacceptable to him. But despite its subversive power, the divisive structure (the Centre-Other binary) cannot be dismantled through mimicry. However it is hybridity or cross-pollenization that changes the texture of the relation and levels down the binary by problematizing categorization, for the hybrid is neither a pure native nor a pure outsider. In her famous work, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Gloria Anzaldua, therefore, not only glorifies mixed-ness for its power to disengage from the dominant culture but urges upon dismantling all types of borders, visible or invisible, that confuse selfhood:

To survive the Borderlands
You must live sin fronteras (without borders)
Be crossroads (Anzaldua 1987, 217)

That is why Walcott celebrates the mongrelity of the hybrid in 'The Schooner Flight':

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. (Walcott
1986, 40-43)

As colonizers are obsessed with purity and would often make the so called 'impurity' an excuse for discrimina-

tion, Postcolonial discourse encourages glorification of hybridity. The subtitle ‘The New Mestiza’ (meaning ‘the new mixed’) of Anzaldúa’s work *Borderlands* also points to this new space where all cultural borders collapse or cease to exist. One understands why the Mexican dramatist Rubén Sierra provocatively names one of his very famous plays *La Raza Pura* or the pure race—the ‘pure’ race in question being the Chicano/a whose blood is mixed—half native half Spanish.

Of the major comic tropes through which the anger, abhorrence and resentment of the subjugated/colonized is expressed, irony and humour are most important. Irony dwells in the contrived gap between the signifier and the signified and leaving a clue that the signifier cannot be taken literally. Hutcheon finds irony most suitable for inscribing Postcoloniality because it is ‘a trope of doubleness’, a “trope that works from within a power field but still contests it” (Hutcheon 1995, 134). In *Heart of Darkness* which is a serious novel for Postcolonial reading, the hollowness of the colonial control has been bantered through dexterous manipulation of the ironic trope which has been conceived comically. At the beginning of the novel Marlow waxes eloquent about the efficiency of the Europeans which distinguishes them from others: ‘What saves us is efficiency--the devotion to efficiency’ (Conrad 2001, 27). On his way to the central station he later on discovers that nothing is in order. One evening when a grass shed catches fire, most peo-

ple are indifferent to the fire accident while one tries to douse the fire using a tin pail ‘with a hole in the bottom of his pail’ (Conrad 2001, 45). Although the incident has been mentioned in passing, it punctures the European vanity about managerial efficiency.

The trope of humour which also makes use of mocking laughter is a weapon of contesting authority much stronger in power. Holoch rightly maintains that, “humor can also serve as a means of rebelling against power and authority, particularly when employed by powerless or oppressed individuals” (Holoch 2012, 22). It may be mentioned in passing that humour is a variety of the comic which consists in agreeable incongruity. The comic in humour often oozes from some absurdity of proposition, as exemplified by the following lines from Johnson:

To shake with laughter ere the jest they hear
 To pour at will the counterfeited tear
 And as their patron hints the cold or heat
 To shake in Dog days, in December sweat. (*London*
 141-144)

The very idea of someone responding to a joke even before hearing it is profusely funny, for it displays absence of sensibility through stupid hyper-responsiveness. Postcolonial texts teem with humour targeted against the authority. In his film *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*In the Land of*

the Diamond King) Ray effects subversion of a tyrannical rule in a style that camouflages the seriousness of purpose with overdose of humour. The mannerism of the megalomaniac King impervious to the plight of his subjects, the ludicrous gestures of the King's ever-nodding yes-men, his cabinet of ministers, facetiously expose the anarchic rule that calls for overthrow. Ray makes a carnivalesque fusion of the sacred and the profane by using several Indian classical ragas in a frivolous song 'Paye Pori Bagh Mama' sung by Goopy and Bagha to cast a spell on the fierce Royal Bengal Tiger protecting the royal treasury. The film also humorously subverts the issue of domination by scientific means always preferred by fascist rulers. Here the machine is not a warhead but called jantarmantar, a blend of RSA and ISA, used to forcefully brainwash the subjects and ensure their consent in the continuance of despotic rule. The table is turned at the end when the king himself has a washing of his brain and in a scene involving Postcolonial mode of comic subversion the king joins hands with his subjects to pull down the statute of authority. Take another example. In *The Strange Man*, Amu Djoletto portrays a grim picture of post-colonial Ghana still writhing under several colonial burdens like the greed for money and profit-margin. The novelist uses humour to undermine civilizing myth of the colonizers. In the grave-digging episode that follows the death of Tete, while others are discussing the proximate causes of Tete's death, Ofori makes speculation about what he might be doing in his

afterlife: “I’m not surprised Tete is gone.... I wonder if people do sell in heaven, but if he has his way, he’s probably trying to sell trumpets to the angels by now at a smart profit” (Djoleto 1967, 6). The idea of selling trumpets to angels, although said in a humorous vein, puts to question the role of the colonizer which planted the profiteering mentality and polluted the native soul.

One major variety of the subversive comic in Postcolonial texts is the black humour. Black humour is not humour that makes light of the otherwise solemn subject matter but rather enhances its gravity by presenting it in a light hearted manner, by consciously rupturing the bond of form and content, of manner of presentation and the matter to be presented. Manjula Padmanabhan’s 1997 play *Harvest* which portrays a grim future of neo-colonial exploitation presents Postcolonial black humour at its best. Although the play is primarily focused on the power of wealth before which people of the Third World are almost helpless, it also uses black humour to travesty hegemonic power. Their economy shattered, the erstwhile colonies continue to be sucked by the First World even after independence. The wealthy elite of the First World take advantage of the poverty of the once colonized people for human organ trafficking. In the play Om, who has lost job enters into a contract with InterPlanta for selling his body-part in exchange of financial succor for his family. The First World turns to the Third World for organ not because it is under-pop-

ulated but because the organs of the First World people are too precious to be put on sale. When Om's mother says whether Ginni and his team who represent the First World have not 'enough of their own people' to donate organs, Om quips: "They don't have people to spare" (Padmanabhan 2001, 223). It may be apparently a jocular reply but it informs us that all rhapsody over human rights is sheer nonsense in a world of social inequality. The sarcasm in Om's remark is essentially Postcolonial, for he sneers at the authority responsible for the distress of the oppressed. The negotiation of the two worlds, wherein one must trace the Postcolonial space, is deeply disturbing despite the funny mode of dramatization. The poor in the Third World lack basic amenities of life. So they ignore the more serious issues like human rights and organ harvesting. This is evident from Ma's remark to Jeetu when InterPlanta constructs a private toilet for the family: "When you reach my age you'll know that a peaceful shit is more precious than money in the bank!" (Padmanabhan 2001, 231). On the other hand, Ginni and his team try to cloak their insidious intent under the garb of benevolence. They are over-anxious about the health of the donor Om not because they love him but because they want a healthy organ for transplantation. This horrible colonial motive has been pricked with a master-stroke of black humour: "if Awum's smiling, it means his body's smiling, and if his body's smiling, it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best" (Padmanabhan

2001, 229). In Ginni's pronunciation the family name of Om Prakash becomes Auwm Praycash: "Oh, my Gad! I see you! Is that really you? Auwm? Praycash?" The pronunciation of 'Om Prakash' as 'Auwm Praycash' is not just rollicking, but is fraught with Postcolonial significance. It reveals how colonial identity is disfigured by the colonizer. It also evokes the Neo-colonial state where the people of the Third World depend on the dole of the First World (*pray cash*) for survival.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o remarks: "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (Thiong'o 2003, 9). Indeed, language has always been a site for Postcolonial resistance. The colonizers taught the native people their language for administrative expediency. Gradually due to several socio-political reasons, the foreign tongue came to occupy the central place in the colonies. For being the principal mode of communication, for being the mother tongue of multitudes, it was impossible to discard it as 'foreign'. After the independence, when the decolonizing process gained ground, language made the task problematic. What to do with this colonial legacy which is the mother tongue of many native people? To accept it is to step into the shoe of the colonizer; to overthrow it is to betray one's own self, which, as confessed by Chinua Achebe, 'produces a guilty feeling' (qtd in *Decolonizing the Mind* 2003, 9). The dilemma has been voiced by many Indian writers, from

Kamala Das to Sujata Bhatt. The Caribbean poet Derek Walcott focuses on the conflicting allegiance of the hybrid self in the following lines from his well-known poem 'A Far Cry from Africa':

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, who choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live? (Walcott 1986,
26–33)

While this is true, in Postcolonial discourse one finds several modes of de-glamourising the centrality of the language of the colonizer. In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati has ridiculed the morbid excesses of over-rating the language of the master in a number of ways. Baby Kochamma is so desperate to impose English on the twins that if ever they spoke in Malayalam, as punishment she would force them to make written commitment that they would always speak in English 'A hundred times each' (Roy 1998, 36). The incorrigible Anglophilia of Pappachi has been mocked by Ammu in terms of a funny abbreviation – he is a 'British CCP' (chi-chi-poach) which is an abuse meaning 'shit wiper' (Roy 1998, 51). Chacko explains to the twins that Anglophilia is so strong in Indian culture that even after independence

instead of decolonizing our minds we Indians “adore our conquerors and despise ourselves” (Roy 1998, 53). Although it is a legitimate criticism, Ammu smells hypocrisy in the remark, for Chako himself is wedded to a Western woman. Hence she quips sarcastically: “Marry our conquerors, is more like it” (Ibid). Through all these amusing details Arundhati Roy shows how ‘the reigning tongue’ (a term used by Gloria Anzaldua in *Borderlands*), can be appropriated and mutilated to create a Postcolonial resistant space.

But since “Master’s tool will never dismantle master’s house”, as held by Audre Lorde, (Lorde 2003, 25), Postcolonialism celebrates linguistic mongrelity which comically disfigures the colonizer’s stamp on the language as effectively as a broken glass distorts an image in reflection. Mongrelity makes the master’s own language sound comic as well as queer to the master. Paradoxically this is not adulteration but a creation that involves transgression of the boundaries set by the reigning tongue. In *Borderlands* in the Chapter ‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’ Anzaldua identifies this linguistic feature as the singular space for constructing distinct emancipated identity. Of the many writers who have explored this Postcolonial scope of defying the code of the reigning tongue, the name of Linton Kwesi Johnson, the Jamaican-British poet deserves special mention. His poetry is recognizably political, for in his poems he often uses the theme of racist victimhood, the bitter experience of a black

Briton and a West-Indian descendant in London. But what is remarkable is his creative use of creolized English, a comic distortion of the King's/Queen's English. This hybrid form is powerful enough not to strike one as a mere parodic caricature and hence it has earned recognition of the linguistic mainstream. For example, in 'Inglan Is a bitch' he reveals the non-European's struggle for survival in a racist environment in a language that resembles English only in the pronunciation of some words:

well mi dhu day wok an' mi dhu nite wok
mi dhu clean wok an' mi dhu dutty wok
dem seh dat black man is very lazy
but it y'u si mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy (Johnson
2006, 35-38)

In his poems Johnson consciously makes funny use of the Jamaican Creole to defy the prescribed patterns of Standard English and also to create a unique resistant space for himself. Bhabha holds that liminality midwifes the emergence of a new hybrid identity. One concludes that this new Postcolonial identity has already been forged through comic distortion of what was once looked upon as inviolable and sacrosanct.

In his essay on Addison, C. S. Lewis praises the Addisonian art comic trivialization of the opponent as if it does not deserve attention at all, an art that is antipodean to the silly art of tilting at the windmill: "What we

might have been urged upon to attack as a fortress, we are tricked into admiring as a ruin” (Lewis 1979, 156). Lewis’s sentence sums up the art Postcolonial comic subversion which never hesitates to interrogate the centre of authority but knows the advantages of dismissing it with a depreciating smile. It is argued that “to rail is the sad privilege of the loser” (Ibid). True, laughter cannot alter real circumstances; it cannot de-center the subject or bring in a counter-discourse that can stop the cultural erasure of the colonized. Nevertheless, it can create a free space for the subject who discovers in the exercise of laughter his own strength of or counter-marginalizing the superpower by pulling down to the plane of the ridiculous. Laughter thus paves the way for disbanding colonial ideology which always precedes the political act of disbanding hegemonic rule, colonial or otherwise.

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*'Evaluate Patriotism with
Logic!': Interruptive
Interiority, Nation and
Indian Stand – Up Com-
edies: A Transactional
Analysis*

Ariktam Chatterjee

*Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
Were like a better way; those happy smilets,
That play'd on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd*

King Lear IV, iii, 18 – 24¹

*Why I don't do jokes on politics? It is because our government is super
chill. Yay, yay, yay. Super chill our government is. Our government
is so bipolar it is not even funny. If I dated someone like the govern-*

ment I would break up on the first day. Our government is insane, okay? I don't do jokes on politics in India because I want to be safe.

(Kenny Sebastian. Live in Chennai.
Why I don't do jokes on politics in India)²

On January 25, 2018, The Times of India carried a news on its social section, which reported that comedian Kunal Kamra has been asked to vacate his house in Mumbai by his landlady, due to what she termed 'political issues' in a whatsapp conversation with the comedian. Kamra later observed in his facebook post that in India, 'as a comedian political opinion comes as a cost'.³ Earlier, Kamra carried out an act named 'Patriotism in India', where he lashed out at the overt exhibition of patriotism and advocacy of militant nationalism that was being promoted by a section of the political leaders of the country, and making the citizens a party to that. Kamra invited death threats and abuses, and what was more his very living was jeopardized. A political leader whom he ridiculed was a close friend of the chief organizer or the CEO of a business firm where his show was slated, and it was scrapped. The trend was dangerous for him, since corporate professionals generally form the core of the audience for stand up comedy in India today. More recently, on April 3 the organizers of the Jaipur literary meet cancelled the show of popular comedian Rahul Subramaniam, since a group of professional performers – DJs of different clubs – took offence at one of his acts; and the organizers decided to stand by the offended rather

than the artist.⁴ Such cases are often reported now. In the program by Kenny Sebastian referred to above, the popular stand up artist states: ‘Why I don’t do jokes on politics is because I’m scared. That’s why? It’s not that I can’t get punchlines in political jokes but I don’t want to get punched on my face’.⁵ Clearly, the stand up comedy in India has become an important platform for raising and disseminating political views. Yet, the question remains is how and why have stand up comedy suddenly gathered such unexpected momentum in the last decade or so – not only are the comedians attracting full house of audience and fans all across the country, but their views and statements are becoming subjects of political activism and retaliatory action as well.

Typically, in a stand up comedy, an individual comedian delivers his item to an audience as a solo performer where the setting may vary from a small and niche pub to a wider audience in a big theatre. Essentially, it is a solo form of performance. Although there may be situations where the comedian works in a duo format, or more—and studies on stand up comedy have included such acts within their purview⁶—yet, this study will confine itself to a study of two primarily solo acts with the belief that its analysis and conclusions can be extended to these forms as well. This article is a theoretical intervention into understanding the psychology and economy that goes behind stand up comedy as a cultural marker, raising enquiries regarding some very basic questions

like what goes behind the performed joke within a social or sphere that make people laugh; joke as an independent category of social utterance and its relationship to the comic; what does it mean when a primarily social act like the joke is transposed to the scene of professional performance – including a certain media of dissemination; finally bringing in the question of value transaction, which in this essay will be confined to political value in the form of nationalism. The final analysis will be an attempt to understand jokes from the point of view of Berne's transactional analysis, which has been found to be absent from existing analyses of jokes.

Theorizing Jokes: Aesthetic, Psychological, Political

Comedy, as a literary genre, has attracted critical and philosophical attention from early times. The comic is related to the generic term 'comedy' in an angular way. There are points of overlaps, where the comic and the comedy cut across each other's path – yet both agree to have a journey quite independent of each others' intrusions, along roads which are distinctly independent. If comedy refers largely to a genre, the comic refers mostly to a response. Of the many differences between the two, what comes foremost to mind is that the first can be read and enjoyed in isolation and be thoroughly enjoyed by usually a trained but often a casual reader. The second, by definition, needs a response to be meaningful.

The theorizing of the comic has two main strands – the aesthetic and the psychological.

To broadly take stock of the aesthetic schools of understanding the comic, it is necessary to note that the differences between the two were not so distinct in the classical period of the modern West. The Comic was understood as a performing - primarily dramatic - form which had the elicitation of the mirthful feeling as its primary objective. In its earlier stage in the West, comedies were meant to elicit spontaneous laughter through ridicule, representation of the grotesque, and presentation of satiric modes. It had its root in Dionysian rituals of Megaris and Sycion and was characterized by strong sexual and scatological overtones. These early plays were yet a long way off the sophisticated satires of Aristophanes, and we come to know of their content mostly through Roman reconstructions like Plautus' *Aulularia* based by common consent on a Menander's lost comedy, a condition not unlike sculpture. Although extremely popular, comedy was never thought to be of the same stature as tragedy – only one day was devoted to its performance as compared to three for the later in the annual City Dionysian festival. Moreover, it resisted strict theorization. Comedy always had something that resisted theorizing, definition and categorization. This discomfort is evident in subsequent interpretation which almost went out to accommodate anything that was not clearly within the tragic vein as comic.

Although it will be hyperbolic to state that tragedy had a clear and definable, and perhaps somewhat static, structure – it in all appearance was more recognizable in its characteristics than comedy; particularly through the clearly discernable towering presence of the tragic hero or heroine, one on whom misfortune amassed itself either through his or her own doing or by chance and forces beyond human control. For comedy, there was no such clear generic marker. This discomfort is most understandably manifest in the various categories that critics have created within comedy itself in subsequent times. In his afterword to *The Labyrinth of the Comedy*, Richard Keller mentions as many as thirty diametrically opposite views that have been presented on comedy, twenty-four of which were based on the idea of social opposition.⁷

The discomfort is not unique to the West. In Indian aesthetic theory, no clear distinction is made between comedy as a genre, the comic as a performance that elicits a certain kind of response, which is laughter, and the joke. In fact, the *rasa* is named after the response – *hasya*. *Hasya* is one of the *rasas* laid out in the *natyasastra*. Regarding the *alambana* (or cause of perpetuation) of *hasya*, Vishwanatha has defined in Chapter IV of *Sahityadarpana*, that –

Vikritakarvakchestam yamalokya haregjanam/tamatrambanam pratu

Thus it refers to the ‘*vikriti*’ or deformity of form or speech, an aberration. But for *hasya* it needs to be qualified, as they themselves may or may not lead to laughter. Shastri states, ‘the term *alambana* has a slightly different shade of meaning when applied to *hasya* on the one hand and *sringara*, *karuna* and *vira* on the other’.⁸ The *sthayibhava* or constant emotion of *hasya* is haas, or laughter. But is that an emotion at all, or is it a *sthayin* only in the sense that it is present in all agencies at some point of time, but is made meaningful, drawing its semantic import only in relation to other *bhavas*. In Sanskrit *Rasa* theory – the gamut of *rasas* – *hasya* is not only about aberration, but an aberration itself. Shastri states ‘the theory of *rasa* as expounded and elaborated by our ancient scholars may not be applicable to *hasya* in toto’.⁹ But this paper would argue that is not the complete picture. There is an irony, not out place, in this argument itself. *Hasya* is not only not an aberration of a *rasa*, it may argued that it is actually the truest of all *rasas*, turning others into if not aberrations, at least incomplete as *rasas*. How so? That is a question we will return to once we understand laughter and not only as an affect but also as an entity within itself, but for that we need to survey the field and find out other theories related to the comic affect and joke.

Western aesthetic theory has been overtly engaged in understanding comedy as dissimulation, as a representative of a dichotomy between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’.

Unmasking has been a latent trope throughout its entire gamut of theoretical enquiry. This may be finally traced to the Bacchic rituals, where actual masks of goats, and fake hooves and phalluses were worn by the participants to create an illusion of excess sexuality. Once the participant was unmasked, the reality was revealed and that caused the laughter. Thus, unmasking has always been a major form of comic exploration. In Western theories of the comic, this has indeed been a bedrock. However, over the years as the ritualistic and nuclear performances increased in depth and volume to become a loosely defined artifact called comedy, this spontaneous sensation turned into joke. A joke is a part of the comic, but a comic cannot be altogether a joke. The sexual root also underlines the fact that there is something deeply psychological that goes on behind a joke work.

Some of the earliest observations on the subject of joke among modern philosophers were by Fischer and Jean Paul. To state Fischer, 'Our whole spiritual world, the intellectual kingdom of our thoughts and ideas, does not unfold itself before the gaze of external observation...and yet it too contains its inhibitions, its weaknesses and its deformities – a wealth of ridiculous and comic contrasts. In order to emphasize these and make them accessible to aesthetic consideration, a force is necessary...the only such force is judgment. A joke is a judgment which produces a comic contrast'.¹⁰ Thus, primarily two aspects are foregrounded by Fischer, first

that the joke revels in comic contrast, and secondly it is a judgment. The third aspect that he states is the purely subjective nature of joke. 'A joke is something comic which we produce, which is entirely subjective', which is attached to action of ours as such, to which we invariably stand in the relation of subject and never of object, not even of voluntary object. Jean Paul considers joke to be able to find similarity between dissimilar things, the more dissimilar the better the joke, a concept that Kraepelin takes further by saying that jokes find association between contrasting ideas. Lipps accepts this idea but states that this contrast is between meaning and non-meaning itself, between sense and senselessness that is the guiding spirit behind every joke. He further states that joke follows a process of bewilderment followed by illumination. Building on this legacy of enquiry, Freud developed his theory of joke in his article 'The Joke and its Relationship to the unconscious'. It became the fountainhead of a number of psychoanalytic interventions which followed in understanding joke, and laughter.

Freud's analysis of joke is a conglomerate of a number of suppositions, the first most predictably being joke as a sublimation of man's unconscious desires to violence, aggression and sex. However, Freud already realizes by the time he makes this hypothesis that the issue of joke is somewhat unique in the sense that it resists reduction to any definition or categories. It is a performance which structurally needs an other to even begin to form.

The listener, audience, reader or in other words, the receptor of the joke is unlike the performer of any other semiotic performance – it is structurally woven within the joke, which he calls a joke-work.¹¹ Freud states that three agencies are necessary for a joke to be one – the speaker, the listener, and a third on whom the joke is, the ‘butt’, so to of the joke. There may be situations where two of these three identities may coalesce and/or collide—e.g. when the joke is on the self, or on the audience—but there too, formally, the three categories are retained. They appear to collide where they do not actually do so. Together, these agencies with the ‘joke’ form a unit, which Freud calls the ‘joke-work’. The joke work, thus, is a space where deep seated desires to violence, aggression, opposition and sex are sublimated in a socially sanctioned way. That, at the outset, may have the appearance of fairly neatly thought out proposition, unless we remain sensitive to the new set of problematic it engenders.

Questions related to power censor, and semiosis. Power is at the root of a joke work. This power may work out at any of the different micro-levels of operation in society – questions of class, gender, nation etc. Freud himself gets sensitive to these undercurrents and divides jokes into two categories, which he himself then goes on to dismantle – i. the tendentious and ii. The non-tendentious is the innocent joke that elicits a smile. But a tendentious joke is judgmental, it criticizes, judges and in-

sults, often through an attack on religion, sex, marriage, politics and institutions and grand narratives of similar ilk. despite its somewhat robust character, it gives rise to boisterous laughter which is its special attraction. Stand up comedy, when it challenges institutions, generally falls within the non-tendentious category.

As we can surmise from the above survey, psychoanalysis has turned into an accepted and widely recognized method to study joke and laughter. The best example that suits our purpose the most is John Limon's book on Stand up comedy¹², where he bases his analysis on the basis of Kristeva's theory of the Abject. Limon uses Freudian analysis of 'tendentiousness' to elaborate it further and bring in an element of Lacan's psychoanalysis to set the structure subverted through the arousal of humour by the comedian within a father-child relationship, governed by the child's need to impress and repudiate the father at one and the same time – to 'stand up' to the father and earn his trust by proving his individuality as an equal. There is conflict and hope for acceptance. This creates an anxiety on the part of the child to stand at a distance from his father in an act of defiance for or otherwise there would be a complete immersion of the self with the structure, the 'systemic status-quo'. It is in this sense that the comedian stands in a certain strategic distance with the events he/she comments on. Standing too close would choke him, smother him, and finally rob him of all identity.

Although the jester/comedian stands at some distance from the rubric he is operating in, he is not standing outside it altogether. He has to be within it, earn the trust of the system, only to trample it later. Limon uses, and we will re-iterate it here since it seems to work exceedingly well, the theory of abject to analyse, not only the role of the jester, but of the joke and what results in laughter as well. Abject has two meanings, and both are brought to play here. The first more general meaning is to be humbled by, to bow down. The second, more technically specific sense, is the one in which Kristeva develops it in her theory of the abject, where it is something we would like to get rid of only with the conscious and deep understanding that we cannot get rid of it permanently. All we can achieve is a temporary cleansing for it to return again – like bodily excreta, boils, wounds etc. Since we cannot get rid of them, the unconscious weaves its own mechanism of defense, thus carrying out a cleansing at a discursive level. The jester, comedian, along with the audience enters into an unwritten and understood contract to exercise the abject together – perhaps the reason why scatological jokes elicit such ready laughter. But abject often is more subtly woven within the joke work. This is when we look at joke as a form of political action.

Igor Krichtafovitch has foregrounded this disrupting effect of laughter, of verbal spite, in *Humour Theory: The Formula of Laughter*.¹³ On the other end of the spectrum, resides Michael Billig's understanding of humour. Bil-

lig argues that all cultures use ridicule as a disciplinary means to uphold norms and conduct and conventions of meaning. In his *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, Billig challenges the basic idea that humour is good and therapeutic.¹⁴ The abject theory of Limon can actually bring both these together from a psycho-analytic perspective, that it is both a challenge to the consolidated power and an intention to stay within it. Freud realizes this, and terms it as ‘tendentious jokes’ in his analysis. He states that a tacit political understanding of joke as a tool of political progress explains why even apparently dense jokes are readily, almost instinctively, understood and realized by an audience. By making political action as a subject of the joke, it turns political action into a joke in itself – whereby resides the politics of the joke. We can here refer to the excerpt from the Chennai act of Kenny Sebastian with which the article began. It is thus obvious, that the latent violence in a joke can become manifest and overturn the structure any given minute. This is the particular danger of joke, where it operates as an agency of subversion par excellence. One example could be the character of Sansthanak in *Mrcchkatika*. He who begins as an instantaneously funny character—an aberration or *vikriti*—becomes dangerous, and an agency of murder and death. The formal rigidity of Western forms of drama make such transitions difficult (one would perhaps have said impossible if not Shakespeare exploited this danger in many of his comedies), but the possibilities were always

lurking just beneath the surface. Shakespeare's' precarious movement in the deep and murky luminal space of these two extremes have been often noted.¹⁵ It is precisely this changeability that makes 'hasya' unique among the rasas. It cannot sustain itself for any length without dismantling itself. It radiates, to use an analogy from the pure sciences, breaks itself down by touching everything around it. That is its nature. The reason why a complete play on 'hasya' has never been written is this – give it time enough, and it will change, which is another meaning of 'vikar' or 'vikriti', noted by aestheticians to be the most identified aspect of 'hasya' rasa. Even the same joke work, on repeating, loses itself. As an abject, it makes its appearance once, in one form, and disappears.

Transaction, Media and Value in Stand Up Comedy

Stand up comedy brings the social performance of telling jokes on the professional stage. His or her role is equivalent to the role of the jester, but it is also different because the material medium through which the performance is disseminated is mass media. The rise of the stand up is connected to the rise of reproducible recording mechanism—through audio records, television and finally through internet channels and DVDs. It is a product meant for mass consumption, and that reorients the theoretical dynamics that we have already discussed by bringing in that one crucial factor that was amiss in the above analyses – the question of transaction, of trade.

Since its growth and dissemination is directly connected to the growth of mass media itself it is therefore imperative that it brings certain values for consumption. A value that is directly connected to the labour time that goes in its creation, performance and consumption (which can be understood by the changes in the consumption slot for stand up comedies in mass media like television) on the one hand; as well as the symbolic value it trades at the same time. Typically, a stand up comedy is structured within a set-up of consumption, where the audience invest to be entertained, and entertained in a form which was in itself is not thought as a part of entertainment i.e. elicitation of laughter. There is a two-way process woven in it – it is the timing, the punctuation of the joke by the laughter of the audience that completes the joke act. By its very nature, the joke work operates within a closed binary structure, which simulates the structure of the market – by the relationship of the product and its ready consumption. The readiness of consumption validates the quality of the product. There remains no other way. This explains the reason why even televised stand-up comedies create a performance like set-up like a live show, which may not be felt to be necessary in other forms of entertainment like a drama or a musical performance. (Even dramatic situations which aim at elicitation of laughter as its primary objective often simulate this structure by the timely punctuation of catch-lines or situations through pre-recorded canned laughter.) Audio records, for example, which were popular in America as

the early disseminators of the art of stand-up comedy also simulated a live set-up, complete with the response of the audiences in the form of uproarious laughter. Thus, joke in stand-up comedy, is a commodity which sets a certain value to itself, both in a material and a symbolic sense.

In the material sense, the rise of the stand up is related to the rise of mass media. McLuhan, in the *Medium is the Message*, asserts that ‘The way in which we send information is more important than the information itself’.¹⁶ This leads us to an argumentative position whereby we can say that the change of the platform for the jester to deliver his or her jests or jokes, have changed the role of the joke, and its content as well. The platform of the drama, which was written text, performed to a few already presupposed a context where those who entered in the transaction—the aesthetic transaction of the stage—entered with a certain understanding of what was to be expected. There was a greater control of the rubric within which the performance played itself out. In mass media, both the reach multiplied manifold and the control diminished. The critical movement of reception was from the audience to the mass. Initially TV shows were the platform within which stand up comedy flourished in the West, but in India, the real boom took place after the growth of the internet, where personalized YouTube channels became the preferred medium for dissemination of this art. As a medium, internet provided both a

high degree of publicity and a possibility to reach a higher number of people, a market which was both huge and specialized; it also was a platform where the institutional modes of censorship were more limited, thus providing a certain degree of freedom. This reduced censorship within the structure often opened up avenues of coercion in more violent ways, like actual physical and psychological harm extended to comedians who chose a critique of power as their subject.

But what was the symbolic value that was transacted in these arts? To go back to our theory of jokes, it is understandable that the joke is arising from a conflict—a conflict between an idea and its acceptance, between social groups, between the personal and the political, between the sexes—the paradigms of conflict may be manifold. However, there has to be a conflict, and there has to be a judgment. And the judgment is uttered in a way, where the comedian—and his or her audience who become of the jokework by responding and thus completing it—manifests a desire to both challenge the authority and be simultaneously accepted by it.

Eric Berne's introduced the concept of transaction analysis within the field of psychology in his influential book *Games People Play*.¹⁷ We will use that premise to understand stand up in this essay, since it brings to the fore the role of transaction within psycho-analysis to analyse social relationships. According to Berne's theory, all

our social actions are based on transactions. As soon as there are two people, sooner or later one will try and communicate with the other. Communications brings and bonds us together as a human race. He states that what transacts between the two units, the sender and the receiver of the message is a relation that is guided by three principles. He calls them the Parent, Adult or Child states (often abbreviated as PCA). Any individual contains these three states simultaneously in his or her psyche. The restrictive and disciplining but ultimately well wishing parent, the adult who makes for rational allowances, and the impulsive child. One person, moves from one state to another, but more commonly simultaneously exists in all these planes. A man's desire for something, his restriction for its acquisition, and the rational explanation of that denial or restriction happen simultaneously. It also comes into fore when an individual is communicating with another individual or a group. The transaction can be pictorially presented as below (Fig. 1):

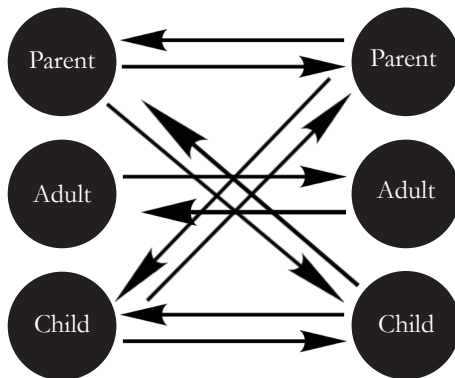


Fig. 1. PAC model of transactional analysis

It is clear from the diagramme on the previous page that there are two possibilities, where the transactions are smooth, and where they cut across each other. If between the two ends, one takes the role of a parent and the other of a child, then the transaction is normative between communicator I (CI) and communicator II (CII), as shown in the figure below:

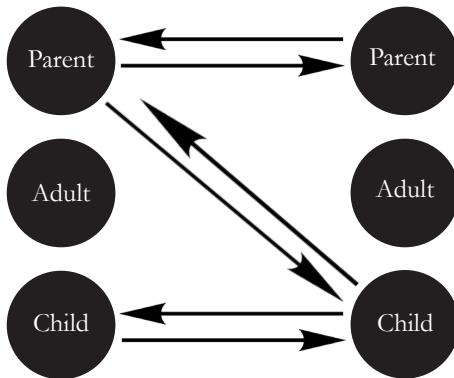


Fig. 2.i Normative response with no cross currents or splits

Another possibility, is when CI and CII takes the following position as represented in Fig 2.1, where both communicate to each other as adults.

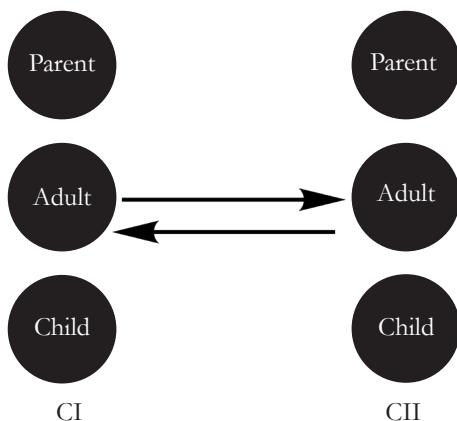


Fig. 2.ii

However, if the other does follow that track and assumes the role of a parent then there is a disconnect and communication breaks down. Or, if one is talking as a parent to a parent, but the other is responding as an adult to another then there is a split. It can be pictorially represented as below:

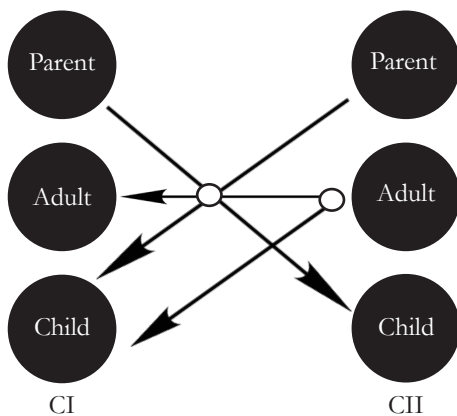


Fig. 3. Splits in transaction showing the location of joke

In the figure on the previous page, the first person is communicating to the other as a child, while the second is responding as an adult to an adult, or an adult to a child. It is at the precise points of intersection that the discomfort lies, and that I argue is the point where jokes, like other acts of judgments are located which disturb the status quo of transaction.

To bring all the above issues together, my analysis of jokes about institutions as they occur in stand up comedies is that we have already seen that there are three parties involved – the jester or comedian, his or her audience, which together form the joke-work, and the ‘butt’ of the joke, which is being judged and commented on, or ridiculed. Fig. 2 (both i and ii) represent the rapport that the comedian builds with his audience, the rapport that the audience in investing it to dismantle its collective relationship with the third aspect – the institution, or ideology, or person that is ridiculed, with which they collectively get into a split transaction. Fig 3 represents the comedian and the audience, now a group, on one side as the first player in the game – and the object of ridicule the second player of the game, with whom its relationship is necessarily split. And it is at the intersections of those split that joke resides.

However, if we look more closely at the model, then a few other aspects become clear to us. For example, the communicator I, here the institution being ridiculed

has to be necessarily subversive, taking a parent role – a psychologically restrictive and prescriptive position to which the communicator ii is always the child. The joke lies in communicator ii's denial to fulfill the role of the obedient child and retort as an adult to an adult or assume the role of the parent and be judgmental on communicator I by treating it as a child. This is an expose – exposing the apparent parent as the child, which is the basis of dissimulation, the unmasking that is so common in all theories of the comic. But, the communicator ii is also dependant on communicator I for its succor. It cannot, so to say, survive without it. It formed it, and thereby demands obedience from it. This becomes very close to the oedipal anxiety of being accepted and challenging the father figure at the same time. And that happens here too. As an abject, communicator ii may not like communicator I, but it cannot undo it altogether, because it is central to its existence. We will now look at a few select portions of stand up performances and see how this transactions plays out there, where the communicator I is the nation.

Nation: Respect and Ridicule

I've never understood ethnic or national pride 'coz to me, pride should be reserved for something you achieve or attain on your own. Not something that happened by accident or birth' (applause) Being Irish isn't a skill. It's a fucking genetic accident'.

(George Carlin on national pride)

Nation is a broad category. Yet, Ernst Renan states there is one unifying factor that binds together its various conceptual and effective forms. He states, 'a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in a common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form'.¹⁹ This consensual undividedness, however becomes problematic when nationalism as an idea and a discourse emerges out of it, and turns it into essential. Bhaba observes how nationalist discourses to 'persistently produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present in the Volk'.²⁰ Yet, within this totalitarian discourse that tries to inscribe nation within its purview lies many an ambiguity. within the tendency to read the Nation rather restrictively; either, as the ideological apparatus of state power ... or, as the incipient or emergent expression of the 'national-popular' sentiment preserved in a radical memory, there resides 'highly significant, recesses of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and oppositional analytic capacities may emerge'.²¹

Indian stand up comedy pitches itself within these spaces, and brings out the fissures that are glossed over in nationalist discourse. It takes many forms – ethnic, gen-

der, racial, linguistic – as is expected in the multicultural ethos of India – but we will here look at only one of those approaches viz. the question of patriotism and nationalism. The premise within which we will build our analysis is to consider the imagined ‘nation’ as a conceptual ‘parent’ component with which the citizen transacts, somewhat adopting the model of social contract theory which forms one of the foundational pillars of the modern nation. Kunal Kamra in his extremely popular and also controversial act on Indian patriotism, beautifully illustrates the relationships referred to above. Let me first lay out excerpts from the act to aid the analysis. Kamra talks about demonetization and the long ATM lines where he apparently stood not for the money but for content observes:

When you are in that ATM line no, it's like after a while you start like bitching the country. And the moment you evaluate the country like properly you know like with logic, whenever you evaluate patriotism with logic, there is this old Indian uncle who just appears (roars of laughter)... Siachen pe hamare jawan hamare liye seema pe khadi hain, aur aap ATM ke line pe nehi khade ho sakte. (with voice modulation)²²

Let us analyse the above transaction. What the comedian is doing here is picking up a particular political move, i.e. demonetization as the subject of his joke. He is particularly critical of the rhetoric of national progress and patriotism that was invoked to justify this act. The

nation, like a parent component, wanted its citizens, as child component, to accept this move as it was meant to be beneficial for the nation at the long run – through a rhetoric that mimics parental censure that is validated by a thought of ultimate good that the child may not at that very moment surmise. Ideally, the citizens unproblematic obedience would have meant the transaction to be smooth and undisturbed. What Kamra does here is disrupt that communication by assuming first the role of an adult, who wants to disengage patriotism from its position of dominant parenthood to that of a reasoning adult – ‘you evaluate patriotism with logic’ are the very words he uses. And then, he invokes the figure of the ‘old Indian uncle’, a paternal figure par excellence who censures the child with an image of patriotism of which the military becomes the cul-de-sac. The joke works well precisely because the audience psychologically finds no problem in associating the parental role of the nation to the figure of patriotic old Indian uncle.

The nation is defined as much as what is beyond it as to what lies within. Bhaba talks about the essential Janus faced nature in nation formation. He states, ‘the ‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside or beyond it’, and yet there is an ‘insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic’. What emerges as an effect

of such “incomplete signification’ is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated’.²³ An act by Rahul Subramaniam, another noted stand up comedian, provides us with an excellent opportunity to see this negotiation in practice. In this act, named ‘Indians and Pakistanis’, he talks about a trip to Barcelona that he undertook with his father’s profident fund money after his retirement, and met a Pakistani restaurant owner. Although he was sceptic in the beginning, they soon became friends and like all friends they bantered a lot over a number of things like cricket, culture and even politics. In political discussions, he tried to prove India’s superiority by referring to the wars of 1965 and 1971, and his Pakistani friends retorted by saying that he remembers it, but his Indian friend does not. This puzzled Rahul Subramaniam, as he thought they were they were the inarguable testimonies to India’s superiority. And then he delivers the punchline, which says –

‘then I realized, *unke textbook mein woh jite hain, aur apne textbook e apun jite hain.* (Pause) *Pata nahin sach kya hain?*’

(They won in their textbooks, and we in ours. Who knows what the truth is!)²⁴

And then, as a Parthian shot he compares this entire war narrative in history to a cricket match between children which ends invariably in commotion, till it gets dark and

one shouts we have won and all join him not knowing exactly who had won and they all return home happily. We can see that apart from questioning the infallibility of nationalist narrative, he foregrounds the role of the 'narrative' in constructing a nation. At the same time, he also shows, how being a narrative it can be dismantled. Finally, by reducing the parent to the child, he cuts across the transactional prerogative, thus creating the laughter.

Conclusion

The above examples show how jokes, and the laughter that they elicit can be a major force to bring out the ambiguities and fissures within an institutional discourse. From the question of materiality, this is significant that the rise of internet and YouTube as modes of dissemination of cultural representation, these voices have found a platform that actually transcends national boundaries. The choice of the subjects, and the language with which these are delivered, shows it to be addressing a global south and a large number of expatriate constituencies as well. The internet, as a medium, have been liberating and made these voice of resistances possible. These comedians often publicize their live shows through their channels, and this shows that people are willing to pay for the subversion – a subversion that more traditional modes of popular expression, like cinema, have at least partially failed to address. It is a force to comply, and the force is being felt – with a little delay, but high impact.

Notes

¹ William Shakespeare. *King Lear*. Ed W.J. Craig. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. (London: Magpie Books, 1992), 932.

² Kenny Sebastian ‘Why I don’t do jokes on politics in India – Stand Up Comedy’ published April 22, 2018, accessed on 27.04.2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azFe8b6yfb0>. accessed 27.04.2018

³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/viral-news/comedian-kunal-kamra-asked-to-move-out-of-his-house-due-to-political-issues/articleshow/62647201.cms> accessed 20.04.2018.

⁴ Siddhant Pandey, ‘Are we taking comedy too seriously: Rahul Subramaniam’s show cancelled amidst threats’, www.inuth.com, published April 03, 2018, accessed on 20.04.2018. <https://www.inuth.com/india/are-we-taking-comedy-too-seriously-rahul-subramanians-show-cancelled-amid-threats/>.

⁵ Kenny Sebastian ‘Why I don’t do jokes on politics in India – Stand Up Comedy’ published April 22, 2018, accessed on 27.04.2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azFe8b6yfb0>.

⁶ John Limon studies Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks in *Stand Up Comedy in Theory, or, Abjection in America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁷ Jan Welsh Hokenson, *The Idea of Comedy: History, Theory and Critique*. Madison (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006).

⁸ A.D. Shastri, “Hasyarasa”, in Proceedings of the Fifth World Sanskrit Conference, Varanasi, India, ed Dandekar and Navatha. October 21-26, 1981.(New Delhi: India: Rashtriya Sanskrit Sans-than, 1985), 340.

⁹ (Ibid), 341

¹⁰ Quoted in Freud. Sigmund Freud. *Joke and its Relationship to the Unconscious*. (1905) Free E-book from www.SigmundFreud.net, accessed 29.04.2018. <https://www.sigmundfreud.net/jokes-and-their-relation-to-the-unconscious-pdf-ebook.jsp>.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud. *Joke and its Relationship to the Unconscious*. (1905) Free E-book from www.SigmundFreud.net, accessed 29.04.2018. <https://www.sigmundfreud.net/jokes-and-their-relation-to-the-unconscious-pdf-ebook.jsp>.

¹² John Limon. *Stand Up Comedy in Theory, or, Abjection in America*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000)

¹³ Igor Krichtafovitch, *Humour Theory: Formula of Laughter* (London: Outskirts Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Michael Billig. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humor* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005).

¹⁵ Madeleine Doran notes the simultaneous phenomena among a section of the Elizabethan dramatists to separate the nomenclature between tragedy and comedy on one hand, and a continued resistance to complete separation on the other in *Endeavors to Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama*. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954).

¹⁶ Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message. Understanding Media’ in *The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

¹⁷ Eric Berne. *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*. accessed 15.04.2018. http://rrt2.neostrada.pl/mioduszevska/course_2643_reading_3.pdf.

¹⁸ George Carlin on national pride. Published by Gabor Henyel on May 14, 2014. accessed on 28.04.2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOmQP9guIl0>.

¹⁹ Ernest Renan. 'What is a nation?' translated and annotated by Martin Thom in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhaba 2000 edition (London and New York, Routledge: first published 1990), 16.

²⁰ Homi K. Bhaba, "Introduction: narrating the nation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhaba 2000 edition (London and New York, Routledge: first published 1990), 1.

²¹ (Ibid) 3.

²² Kunal Kamra, Stand up comedy on Patriotism and the Government. Publishe by Kunal Kamra on May 1, 2017. accessed on 28.04.2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBbpFGGA-kmo&t=80s>.

²³ Bhaba, 4.

²⁴ Rahul Subramaniam, Stand up on India and Pakistan, published by Random Chikibum on November 3, 2016. Accessed on 27th April, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4x6q-SuFovI>.

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Postcolonial Humour:
Jokes in Ana
Menéndez's "In Cuba I
Was a German
Shepherd"

Emily O'Dell

Colonial oppression and its resulting power dynamics inevitably lead to the marginalization of people and cultures. However, despite the efforts of the colonizer to delegitimize them, the cultures of colonized people are frequently resilient and it is possible for elements of their folklore to be preserved and adapted during and following colonization. According to Frantz Fanon, "A national culture under colonial domination is a contested culture whose destruction is sought in systematic fashion"; however, in a postcolonial context, "oral traditions— stories, epics, and songs of the people—which formerly were filed away as set pieces are now

beginning to change. The storytellers whoused to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental” (1963, 237, 240) Ritualized joke-telling is one such adaptable oral tradition, which creates a sense of belonging that allows marginalized postcolonial individuals to unite as a folkgroup . Jokes, as ritual performances, create a ritual space that either allows participants to suspend reality or engage with it in productive and creative ways. In this article I will discuss how Ana Menéndez’s fictional short story "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" demonstrates how jokes are creative forces that allow performers to establish folkgroups, assert their identities, and engage with their emotions outside of the restrictions of quotidian reality.

The main character of "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd", Máximo, is a Cuban man who was exiled from his home by Castro’s dictatorial regime and has been forced to adapt to foreign surroundings while struggling to maintain his Cuban cultural identity. As a result of the imposed distance that separates him from his native country, culture, and community, Máximo utilizes jokes to create a Caribbean folk-group with similarly displaced males. This practice of telling jokes is a specific type of folkloric performance that requires that the performer adhere to a ritualized structure in a specific context to inspire the intended reaction from his or her audience. As Fine and Wood write, “the joke is not only a window

into the beliefs of the society and the moral behavior permitted within a local setting, but is also a window into the strategic intentions of the teller” (2010, 304).

Within this group, Máximo uses the ritual space created by jokes to express opinions and emotions that he would otherwise be unable to engage with due to societal expectations associated with masculinity, while his audience uses the same space to suspend their quotidian realities through laughter and/or introspection. Furthermore, due to the ritualized structure of the joke, the performance creates a ritual space that allows the performer and the audience to temporarily exist outside of their quotidian realities:

The nature of ritual, the way it is framed as a separate time and experience outside the everyday world, allows the participants to enter a space that is different from their real world environment [...] Because ritual spaces are different from ordinary life, people can do and say things in a ritual that in their daily experience would be unusual, perhaps even inappropriate or unacceptable. (Sims and Stephens 2011, 109, 110)

As a result, the performer is able to deliver his message using whatever means necessary to convey the desired information and/or inspire the reaction of his audience without fear of transgressing societal conventions. As a result, jokes have become prevalent in moments of instability, particularly in postcolonial situations like that

of the Cuban exiles in Menendez's short story, when individuals seek out ways of "reflect[ing] anxieties that come with alterations in the social order" and jokes become a way for them to "react to their feelings of a loss of certainty and stability" (Fine and Wood 2010, 303).

Like the majority of the Caribbean, the postcolonial nation of Cuba has a history of involuntary political exchange. The island was under Spanish control until the late nineteenth century, which resulted in the implementation of a plantation system, the introduction of the transatlantic slave trade, and the beginnings of the multiracial and multiethnic society that would become inextricably linked to Cuban culture. Following the Spanish-American War, Cuba was ceded to the United States and, in 1902, was declared an independent republic. In addition to imperial oppression and political exchanges, against which Cuban citizens frequently rebelled, the country has also suffered neocolonial, authoritarian regimes. One of the most internationally recognized leaders is Fidel Castro, who controlled Cuba from 1958 until 2008. While Castro was in power, thousands of Cubans left, voluntarily and involuntarily, and by any means necessary, to begin new lives in other countries, particularly in the United States: "Since the triumph of Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959, there has been a steady influx of Cubans into the United States, ed by four significant waves: 1959-1962; 1965-1974; 1980; and 1993-5. Each wave has reached deeper into the layers of Cuban so-

ciety, from the wealthy in the 1960s to the dwellers of Havana's squalid inner city neighborhoods in the 1990s" (PBS 2005).

Castro's regime is the political backdrop of Menéndez's story and the protagonist, Máximo, represents the countless Cubans who left everything behind to immigrate to the United States. Although Máximo voluntarily chose to leave Cuba in 1961, he had only intended to relocate for a short period of time to escape the political and economic shifts that were beginning to affect the country. However, as a result of his initial belief that Castro would soon be out of power and that he and his family would be able to "return in two years' time. Three if things were as serious as they said" (Menéndez 2001, 6).

Although Máximo is plagued by feelings of bitterness toward Castro for distancing him from Cuba, "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" depicts Máximo as an elderly widower who has had time to accept that he and his family will never return to live in Cuba. As a result of this acceptance, joke-telling becomes a coping mechanisms that express the emotional struggle accompanying the loss of his nation, his culture, and his history. According to Derek Walcott, this creative or productive impulse is a defining feature of postcolonial Caribbean identity. Walcott writes, "in the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered, what has

mattered is the loss of history... what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention” (1974, 259). As a result of leaving Cuba, Máximo feels the loss of his history and his insignificant position in the United States, which is what inspires him to create and perform jokes to express his feelings, assert his Cuban identity in the diaspora, and create a folkgroup with other Caribbean men in the diaspora to compensate for his condition as a postcolonial Cuban exile.

Like many Cubans, after arriving in Miami, Máximo had to reinvent himself in order to assimilate into American society. He realized that he was “too old to cut sugarcane with the younger men” and that his “Spanish and his University of Havana credentials meant nothing”, which forced him to relinquish his identity as a professor and establish a place for himself in the food service industry (Menéndez 2001, 6). This professional demotion was a necessity for Máximo to adapt to his new American surroundings and become a contributing member of society. As a result, Máximo and his family settled in Miami’s Little Havana neighborhood , where he was able to reaffirm his Cuban identity through daily communication with other similarly exiled individuals. However, although these quotidian interactions provide Máximo with a superficial connection to his homeland, the majority of the time they consist of sharing an idealized Cuba that does not allow for the same productive expressions of negative sentiments or create the same sense of belonging as Máximo’s jokes:

People who come from the same place and think they already know the important things about one another... [they] would start the stories that began with 'In Cuba I remember.' They were stories of old lovers...Of skies that stretched on clear and blue to the Cuban hills [...] In Cuba, the stories always began, life was good and pure. (Menéndez 2001, 5, 7).

These types of expressions contain a “homing desire” which connects an individual to a “mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (Brah 1996, 192), and helps them cope with the idea that “the island haunts all of us Cubans; it won’t let us go, no matter what distance we travel to get away” (Behar 2008, 3). However, these exchanges are not as productive a means of expression as Máximo’s jokes, which create a ritual space within which the protagonist is able to engage with and express his emotions.

In order to cope with the loss of their home country and their former lives, the stories told by many of the exiles only represent the idyllic beauty of Cuba. However, despite their insistence on the perfection of the Cuban landscape, they seem to be haunted by the “withering, malignant” memories of the traumatic reality: “the stories that opened in sun, always narrowed into a dark place” (Menéndez 2001, 7). Máximo is not immune to the potential for darkness and depression that can be inspired by his position as an exile in Miami, but, instead of telling nostalgic stories about his personal experiences in

Cuba that begin joyfully and end in despair, he tells jokes to his fellow domino players to cope with the memory of Cuba that “menaces and haunts [his] present domestic space” (Socolovsky 2005, 238). In his jokes he uses *choteo* humour, which is defined by its subversive nature or its “selective disrespect for those kinds of authority that one thinks illegitimate” (Firmat 1984, 68). Although he also accepted that he will never physically return to his native island, using Cuban humour to express his identity allows him to maintain an emotional connection to Cuba. He also creates a Caribbean folkgroup with three other elderly exiled individuals from the Spanish Caribbean with whom he plays dominoes-- one other Cuban and two Dominicans-- in Domino Park . This folkgroup is formed from both necessity and choice:

Other twosomes began to refuse to play with the Dominicans... any team that won so often must be cheating... But Máximo and Raúl liked these blessed Dominicans, appreciated the well-oiled moves of two old pros. And if the two Dominicans, afraid to be alone again, let them win now and then, who would know, who could ever admit to such a thing? (Menéndez 2001, 11).

To transform this assembly of people into a folkgroup, Máximo participates in the performative act of joke-telling: “[S]oon came Máximo’s jokes during the shuffling, something new and bright coming into his eyes like daydreams as he spoke... the four men learned to linger long enough between sets to color an old memory while the

white pieces scraped along the table” (Menéndez 2001, 11). Through his choteo jokes, Máximo creates a folk-group and a ritual space within which he is able to defy machismo and express emotions like frustration and bitterness that in another context would betray his vulnerability.

Máximo interacts with these other Caribbean males in the park, which is a locality where, because of the number of elderly Caribbean men who play dominoes there, it should be simple to establish a Caribbean folkgroup. However, because it is a male-dominated sphere, it is also where he is most subjected to machismo. Machismo is a socially constructed view of male action and interaction in many Latino cultures, including the Spanish Caribbean. Traditionally, the idea is attached to male power and an ability to provide for one’s family, but there is another dimension of it that corresponds to particular social situations involving other males. *Machismo* dictates much of Latino male interaction because to not possess sufficient masculinity can lead to being considered a maricón or a homosexual. Therefore, it is expected that men do not openly express their emotions because it is a sign of vulnerability, which is synonymous with weakness and a lack of masculinity:

Each macho must show that he is masculine, strong, and physically powerful. Differences, verbal or or physical abuse, or challenges must be met with fists or other weapons. The true macho shouldn’t be afraid of anything...

The impotent and homosexual are scoffed at— the culturally preferred goal is the conquest of women, and the more the better... one's potency must be known by others, which leads to bragging and storytelling. (Ingoldsby 1991, 57-58)

Machismo is demonstrated in "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" through the lack of conversation between the domino players about their personal lives, the competition that drives their interactions, and their desire to demonstrate their virility by discussing their sexual conquests whenever they see a beautiful woman walk by: "‘No me jodas,’ Raúl said. ‘You are a vulgar man. I had a life all three of you would have paid millions for. Women’..." The women of Cuba were radiant, magnificent..." (Menéndez 2001, 12-13). Therefore, to escape the social expectations associated with machismo, joke-telling becomes particularly valuable for Máximo who is able to use these performances to create a ritual space outside of his daily life, which is dictated by *machismo*, in which he can engage with his emotions and express his opinions without fear of negative judgment by other men.

Although the two Dominican members of the folk-group cannot always understand that Máximo's jokes contain a deeper truth and reflect "all the layers of hurt" that characterize the Cuban diasporic experience, they are nevertheless able to participate in the folkgroup (Menéndez 2001, 9). They are able to find amusement in the absurdity of Máximo's jokes and superficially learn

about Cuban culture through these performances. For example, Máximo jokes about a young Cuban school boy who, when he is asked what he wants to be when he grows up, responds, “I would like to be a tourist” (Menéndez 2001, 16). This joke addresses both the travel restrictions placed on Cuban nationals and the impoverished status of the Cuban people who could not afford to leave their communist country even if it were permitted. As a result of these factors, for many years Cubans were unable to leave the island without extensive paperwork, government approval, and/or external sponsorship. Therefore, through this joke, Máximo is expressing the frustration and sadness of knowing that children, like the boy in the joke, can only dream of the wealth and freedom necessary to travel to other countries, a fact that he and his friends, as residents of the United States, have the luxury of taking for granted. This joke is not fully comprehended by the Dominicans, who have not experienced the same oppression as the Cubans, but Raúl, the other Cuban of the group and the person who is most familiar with these sentiments, reacts to the joke by stating it is “so funny it breaks [your] heart” (Menéndez 2001, 16).

On the other hand, Máximo’s second joke is more easily understood by all members of the folkgroup. It is about a group of people who are preparing to illegally leave Cuba via raft when they see Fidel Castro walk by wearing swim trunks and carrying a raft on his back. When

the group asks him why he is carrying a raft, Fidel answers “I’m sick of this place too. I’m going to Miami” to which the rafters reply, “Coño, compadre, if you’re leaving then there’s no reason for us to go. Here, take my raft too, and get the fuck out of here” (Menéndez 2001, 8). Like the previous joke, this one criticizes the Cuban government for its policies and blames Fidel Castro for the country’s problems, particularly the departure (and deaths) of the thousands of balseros, or rafters, who made the perilous journey on homemade flotation devices. The joke also implies that, if Castro were to leave Cuba, then the Cubans would no longer have any reason to leave and would be able to reclaim control of their country. The two Dominican men laugh at the absurd image of the Cuban leader escaping his own country by raft, which contributes to their sense of belonging to the folkgroup, but, more significantly, Máximo’s joke is intended to give him a chance to voice his opinions and frustration about the detrimental effects of Castro’s leadership on the Cuban people and his bitterness toward the man responsible for his exile.

Máximo’s third joke is about Bill Clinton, the president at the time of the story, who has been frozen and awakens in the year 2105. A Jewish person informs Clinton that the Middle East is now a peaceful place and an Irishman reports that the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have united to become one harmonious country. However, when Clinton asks about the situation in

Cuba, the Cuban character replies “Let me tell you, my friend, I can feel it in my bones. Any day now Castro’s gonna fall” (Menéndez 2001, 4). Again, the Dominicans laugh at the absurdity of the joke, which arises from the idea that someone could live to be 179-years-old, as Castro would be in 2105. However, Máximo uses the joke to express his disapproval of the violence and death associated with the situation in Cuba, which he considers to be equivalent to that in Northern Ireland or the Middle East, and to express the widespread fear that Castro and/or his political influence will continue forever and Cuba will never be able to alter its current circumstances.

Lastly, Máximo’s most meaningful joke is about a Cuban dog, Juanito, who immigrates to Miami. In the joke, Juanito is “just off the boat from Cuba” and is bewitched by the dazzling, cosmopolitan city. However, when he attempts to attract the attention of an “elegant white poodle”, the poodle rebuffs him and calls him “a short, insignificant mutt” (Menéndez 2001, 22, 28). The punch line, which is Juanito’s response to the poodle’s insult, is the dog’s declaration that, “Here in America, I may be a short, insignificant mutt, but in Cuba I was a German shepherd” (Menéndez 2001, 28). For Máximo, this joke conveys the humiliation and social demotion that he experienced when he first arrived as an immigrant in the United States. By telling it, he is able to express some of the sadness and bitterness that still plague him many years later.

Unlike the other jokes, the one about the German shepherd inspires an emotional response from all of the members of the Caribbean folkgroup, both Cuban and non-Cuban. They, like Máximo, identify with the humiliation felt by the anthropomorphic canine character who has been rejected by American society, which is represented by the white American dog. Like Juanito, these men have suffered the trauma of being separated from their homes, arriving in Miami, and facing traumatic humiliation and feelings of displacement in their new environment. These painful memories are repressed in day-to-day life in order to conform to the societal expectations of *machismo*. However, during the momentary suspension of reality that occurs during a joke, the laughter that would normally unite the group is replaced by a common emotional response to the memories of a shared past that connects the four men of their folkgroup on a deeper emotional level: “The past is a country from which we have all emigrated, its loss is part of our common humanity” (Rushdie 1991, 12).

Although the apparent purpose of participating in the ritualized performance of joke-telling is to amuse the group, the process of telling them also allows Máximo a means to express his complex feelings of bitterness, assert his Cuban identity, and to create a shared community with other expatriate Caribbean men through the expression of his experiences of degradation and struggle in a coded manner. According to Elliot Oring,

one reason to use the performative joke form for these purposes is because, “jokes are forms par excellence that deal with situations of unspeakability because they may conjoin an unspeakable, and hence incongruous, universe of discourse to a speakable one” (1987, 282). Or, in other words, joking creates a ritual space that allows the speaker to express real yet unspeakable feelings by discussing an apparently unrelated speakable or absurd idea (e.g. dogs, Fidel Castro on a raft, Fidel Castro living forever, or school children) in a humorous way.

In the story, creating a speakable discourse through jokes, whether or not the audience consistently understands the complex reality they represent, creates a sense of belonging among the men and results in the creation of a Caribbean folkgroup. Although they are not all Cubans and, therefore, cannot always recognize the hidden meanings in Máximo’s jokes, these rituals allow the men to unite through a shared sense of belonging established through their participation in the performance: “For many months they didn’t know much about each other, these four men... But soon came Máximo’s jokes... something new and bright coming into his eyes like daydreams as he spoke. Carlos’ full loud laughter, like that of children” (Menéndez 2001, 11). In the ritual space created by the jokes, the audience is able to momentarily suspend reality and distance themselves from their daily lives, while Máximo engages with his reality, asserts his Cuban identity, and speaks about his opinions and emotions outside of the daily restrictions of *machismo*.

Although every member of the folk-group participates in the humour of the space, the non-Cuban members of the audience listen without interpreting the true meanings behind the jokes because they are not accustomed to *choteo* humour and/or they do not subscribe to the same cultural identity as the Cubans. Until Máximo tells the German shepherd joke, ritualized joke-telling allows the Dominicans to momentarily suspend their realities by listening to and superficially responding to the joke. However, the German shepherd joke encourages the men to engage with their past realities by reminding them of the traumatic experiences they had as newly arrived immigrants from the Spanish Caribbean; therefore, the joke reinforces their membership in the Caribbean folkgroup because it unites them through a common trauma.

The other Cuban member of the group, Raúl, is consistently capable of decoding the multilayered meaning behind Máximo's jokes. He disapproves of the jokes his fellow countryman tells and resists participating in the ritual because he believes that the jokes pose a risk because they could potentially reveal too much about Cuban identity to cultural outsiders. However, when he hears the German shepherd joke, Raúl realizes the cathartic aspect of the performance, which allows Máximo to defy *machismo* and create a speakable discourse to express his unspeakable emotions and opinions. It also inspires Raúl to recognize the cultural similarities be-

tween himself and the other non-Cuban audience members. As a result, he is able to recognize the value of the joke form as a tool that inspires both performer and audience to replace shared laughter with memories of a common past that further reinforces their folk-group.

Jokes are a powerful force in Menéndez's story that are capable of establishing a folk-group amongst people of different national and cultural backgrounds. Even when they are not fully understood, jokes are rituals that create a ritual space in which the performer and the audience are able to interact outside of their daily realities. The performer, Máximo, is able to reinforce his cultural identity and form a folkgroup by voicing his emotions and opinions through his jokes. This is possible because of the situational and cultural specificity associated with Cuban choteo humour and his position as a postcolonial Cuban living in the diaspora. Similarly, the audience is able to momentarily suspend and distance themselves from reality by reacting, either through laughter, as demonstrated in Máximo's first three jokes, or through a shared sadness, as seen in the German shepherd joke. Within the ritual space created by the ritualized folkloric performances of joke-telling, a variety of possibilities are conceivable for the performer and the audience. As demonstrated in Menéndez's "In Cuba I Was A German Shepherd", in a postcolonial Cuban context, jokes are creative forces that are capable of establishing folkgroups and transforming the unspeakable (e.g. trauma)

to a speakable coded discourse that allows the performer to humourously and subversively express emotions in a ritual space outside of daily life. The audience also benefits from the ritual space created by the joke-telling ritual because it allows them to either momentarily suspend their realities or to creatively engage with them and a way to build community. For these reasons, ritualized joke-telling is a humourous oral form that is capable of surviving colonization and continuously adapting to culturally specific postcolonial and diasporic situational contexts.

Notes

¹ A folkgroup refers to “any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is— it could be a common occupation, language or religion— but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally most groups consist of many individuals” (Dundes 1980, 7).

² Little Havana is a neighborhood in Miami that is considered to be “the heart of Cuba in exile” (Hetter 2017). In addition to Cubans, the neighborhood is also populated by immigrants from other parts of Latin America, which has contributed to the preservation of its Latino identity. In 2017 Little Havana was named a “National Treasure” by The National Trust for Historic Preservation.

³ Domino Park or Máximo Gomez Park is located in Little Havana and is famous as a site where elderly, predominately male, individuals congregate to play dominoes and socialize.

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*Hybridism, Humour and
Alternative Possibility:
Negotiating Identity in
Sukumar Ray's Literary
Nonsense*

Ishita Banerjee

Writing about humor and humorists is perforce an awkward business. For after all, the humor is funny; it is aimed at the risibilities, designed to make the reader laugh, not think. So when one sets out to think about it and to subject it to analysis, there is always the lurking suspicion that, in doing so, one is not only responding improperly, but behaving just a trifle ridiculously. (Rubin 1963, iv)

This realization of Luis Rubin while writing the editorial preface to *The Comic Imagination in American Literature* traces back to a perennial problem inherent within the significance of humor in any serious discussion in liter-

ature. Right from the days of Plato and Aristotle there has been a series of theories judging the relevance of humor in contemporary literature but the argument has remained yet unresolved. In spite of the fact that critics across the countries in different ages have come up with various comprehensive explanations of humor, the essence of their discussions has been lost in the whirlpool of terminologies and literary jargons rather than examining the continuum of the true mechanism of humor:

... the most general and neutral notion available to cover a whole variety of behaviour; from apophthegms to spoonerism, practical jokes to puns, farce to foolery. In other words we see humour as any message—transmitted in action, speech, writing, images or music—intended to produce a smile or a laugh. This definition allows us not only to extend our investigations to antiquity, the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period, but also to pose questions of interest to cultural historians: who transmits what humour in which way to whom, where and when? (Bremmer 1997, 1)

The legacy of this negative assessment of laughter has been associated with thoughts as ancient as those of Plato who vehemently opposes the inclusion of any comic thoughts within the purview of his ideal state—“We shall enjoin that such representations be left to slaves or hired aliens, and that they receive no serious consideration whatsoever. No free person, whether woman or man, shall be found taking lessons in them.... No composer of comedy, iambic or lyric verse shall be permitted

to hold any citizen up to laughter, by word or gesture, with passion or otherwise” (Plato 1978, 816-935)—and Aristotle who in his *Nicomachean Ethics* provides a firm warning that—“... a jest is a kind of mockery, and lawgivers forbid some kinds of mockery—perhaps they ought to have forbidden some kinds of jesting.” (Aristotle 1941, 4-8) and finally stretches forth to those of the institutionalized Christian lawmakers who primarily focus on the practice of self-control and therefore scornfully rejects laughter as a sign of pusillanimity.

The definition of laughter and the theories associated with its impact upon the human mind, however, has undergone a major transformation down through the ages. The Greek philosophers’ negative attribution on laughter along with the Christian Europeans vehement opposition against laughter continued in the Medieval Reformatory initiations as well. Although in the medieval ages the concept of humour was not, in any way, connected to the philosophy of laughter - the attitude towards any form of laughter was essentially derogatory and derisive. This attitude was even more strengthened by the philosophical treatises of Hobbes and Descartes whose identification of human beings as naturally individualistic and competitive nurtures our antipathy towards laughter as the essential signs of scornful evil and ridicule:

Sudden glory is the passion which makes those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of

their own, that pleases them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favor by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much laughter at the defects of others, is a sign of pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper works is, to help and free others from scorn; and to compare themselves only with the most able. (Hobbes 1982,163)

The negative attributes associated with the concept of laughter dominated the Western psyche for more than two millennia before we witnessed the 20th century phenomenon of the emergence of laughter as a superiority cult developed in the hands of Roger Scruton who treated laughter as an ‘attentive demolition’ of a person. This superiority cult, however, did not run its course for long and received a severe blow with the 18th century emergence of two theories associated with the evolution of laughter – the Relief theory and the Incongruity theory. Lord Shaftesbury in his 1709 essay *An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* propounds the notion of laughter as a pressure release system of human body and it helps a man to get rid of the excess of animal spirit. This view was later supported by authors like Herbert Spencer in his essay *On the Physiology of Laughter* (1911). This notion was further supported by renowned psychologists like Sigmund Freud and John Dewy and others in their developmental psychoanalytic discours-

es. In a direct opposition to the superiority cult there emerges the philosophy of incongruity in the hands of James Beattie when he links the word incongruous with the essential source of laughter:

[our laughter] always proceeds from a sentiment or emotion, excited in the mind, in consequence of certain objects or ideas being presented to it ... [it] seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage ... [The cause of humorous laughter is]... two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them. (Beattie 304-320).

This notion of laughter has got an immense critical back up from the philosophers like Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard who have popularized it to be the dominant theory in the history of the philosophy of humour. Thus categorizing humour as existing in the gaps our sense perception and the material reality we arrive at the identification of laughter as a subversion of the dominant discourse. It is here that laughter becomes a parallel system existing immediate underneath the overriding practices of power dynamics and simultaneously undercutting the metanarrative with its pungent sharpness.

Now when it comes to the role of laughter in the postcolonial discourse the matter is all the more problematized. Since the postcolonial discourse deals with the

larger dynamics of cultural exchanges among the several groups and subgroups contributing an ephemeral synergy to that particular moment of laughter, it would be utterly frustrating if there is no sense of shared reception of meaning between the text and its subtext. This, in a way, brings us closer to the idea that laughter, with all its various subgenres, always resides under the skin of an accepted metanarrative as some kind of an incompatibility or incongruity which is tightly controlled by the dictums of social normativity and which desperately looks for the fissures to come out and seek for an eternal relief:

...laughter has always been seen as arising out of some kind of incompatibility or some incongruity... The concrete manifestations of laughter arising from such a constellation range from subversive laughter, carnivalesque exhilarations, wry smiles, self-deprecation, gallows humour, or black humour to more conciliatory and healing humour, or to the wild and eerie laughter of the otherwise silenced “madwoman in the attic.” All these reflect a struggle for agency, an imbalance of power, and a need, a desire, for release.” (Reichl 2005, 9)

Thus it is the well patterned distribution of a self-contained subtext that provides it a cohesive function propelling the humour inherent within it. The moment we talk about the agency and power dynamics associated with the generation of humour, we cannot simply deny the contribution of Sigmund Freud in analyzing the system of suppressed desire in human mind and its

outburst in the form of subversive laughter. In this article, however, I am not taking the Freudian notion of laughter in its restricted and complicated specification (joking, wit and comic), rather I would try to locate the implication how laughter has been utilized as one of the major weapons of resistance to dismantle the overriding identity politics in the postcolonial context and how it seeks for a third space of negotiated identity within this problematic zone. Our discussions of laughter as having a cathartic impact upon the human mind immediately refer back to the stressful situations under the dominant orders of colonialism. Going by a very simple and generalized notion of Postcolonialism we can locate quite an interesting interdependence of the hierarchic social order and that of the function of laughter:

Postcolonial discourse analyses how the historical fact of European colonialism continues to shape the relationship between the West and the non-West after former colonies have won their independence. Postcolonialism describes the continuing process of resistance and reconstruction by the non-West. Post-colonial theory explores the experiences of suppression, resistance, race, gender, representation, difference, displacement and migration in relation to the master Western discourses of History, Philosophy, Science and Linguistics. (Sardar 2004, 15)

Thus laughter functions as a marker of ethnic culture with an organization of shared views and beliefs, practices and standards and provides a common perception and interpretation of the world around.

The association of humour with the process of identity formation and resistance building is performed in two ways – subversion and transformation. The inherent paradox of the colonizer/colonized interface essentially depends upon the deep rooted prejudices of racism and the all-pervasive filters which scrutinizes all non-western cultural practices in their own terms. This paradoxical misrepresentation in the cultural hegemony grudgingly works through a process of stereotyping and stigmatization. It is at this point that humour is used to critically analyze the given construct of colonial cultural superiority and skilfully undercuts the falsified attitudes of an illusory power. As for example we can refer to the whole genre of comic strips and slapstick comedy which exists in the very womb of mainstream power politics but subverts and dismantles the same with an extreme subtlety.

In this regard let us have a quick analysis of how nonsense writing, generation of humorous laughter and fun and the negotiability of individual and ethnic identity – all these are integrally intertwined within a common thread of postcolonial power structure. The emergence of nonsense writing as a popular literary genre can be traced back to the 19th century Victorian England in the hands of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear with the primary intention of providing entertainment and amusement to the target group of the child readers. The primary problem of children's literature, in my opinion, lies in the confused construction of 'childhood' as a binary

opposition to 'adulthood'. The basic mystery of this problem lies in the eternal conundrum of some simple conjectures – whether it is the question of mapping the true imprints of a child's individual imaginative process or it is merely a straightforward codification of an adult simplified. At the very outset the notion of the child is both synchronically and diachronically defined by a cultural matrix where the very identity of the child is skilfully situated. In most of the situations the focus rests on the adult writing a children's narrative either through his own retrospective vision or through a purely imaginative glass of smoky vision that depends on some premeditated assumptions. Children's literature, however, undergoes an extensive process of evolution with a constantly shifting focal area down through the pages of history. These ironic representations or misrepresentations of the child categorically lead to an even more paradoxical end. The identification originates from a wrong notion of a limited and fixed schema and lack of accessibility of the child. This underestimation of the child potential calls for a rigid child/adult segregation and the adult world takes it to be their tedious responsibility to explain each and every complex issues in more simplistic terms. But this mode of over simplification leads to a dangerous illusory status based on the adult perception.

Although this genre of nonsense writing has taken the children as its primary target, there is not a single bit of opportunity to relegate it to the problem zone of a dan-

generously oversimplified status of trivial literature. The very word 'nonsense' incorporates an enigma of signification with an elusive attribute of meaning. On a superficial glance the word refers to something without any sense or meaning; a negation of all sense perception; a non-word or non-entity. A deeper probing would take us through a mazy motion of order and meaning almost in the pattern of Saussure's sliding signification. This game of sense/nonsense dialectic leads us to another similar game show of power relations and it is here that the idea of nonsense finds its close relations to the problematics of identity formation. It reiterates the fact that human identity does not reside in a fixed space of ordered signification rather it has an inherent fluidity that ultimately releases itself, both epistemologically and politically, into a central alterity of an 'other'. This interplay between the self and the other elaborates upon an interconnection of cross-cultural experiences which consistently try to break down the inert, monolithic pattern of our structured hierarchy: "... a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference." (Hoogvelt 1997, 158) The emergence of this 'third space' through the negotiation of two or more cultural specification "... constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity, that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew" (Bhabha 1994,

37). As Habermas suggests, "... reacting to the homogenizing pressure of a material world culture, new constellations often emerge which do not so much level out existing cultural differences as create new multiplicities of hybridized forms" (Habermas 2002, 75). Hybridity also operates upon a nonlinear reality of historical specificity.

The aesthetics of humor, therefore, resides in this collaborative anticipation of a trans-active cultural overlap, an incongruity leading to a subsequent ambivalence – "It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" (Bhabha 1994, 173). This displacement of domains and the differences of collective ethnic experiences gives birth to the bouts of laughter and provides the essential space for the working of nonsense. The moment of laughter arising from the cultural overlap is rather evoked as a matter of relationality as Paul Gilroy highlights in his discussion of a multicultural unification: "We do not have to be content with the half-way house provided by the idea of plural cultures. A theory of relational cultures and culture as relation represents a more worthwhile resting place" (Gilroy 2000, 275). The gradual evolution of new cultural forms and identities anticipates some kind of a 'syncretism' and therefore the laughter arising out of this bears the burden of an artificial enforcement almost verging on tears.

The nonsense then, is a genre of narrative literature

which balances a multiplicity of meaning with a simultaneous absence of meaning. This balance is effected by playing with the rules of language, logic, prosody and representation, or a combination of these. In order to be successful, nonsense must at the same time invite the reader to interpretation and avoid the suggestion that there is a deeper meaning which can be obtained by considering connotations of associations, because they lead to nothing. (Tigges 1988, 27)

In his synchronic or rather anachronic explanation of ‘nonsense’ Wim Tigges legitimately takes it to be a versatile literary device to substantiate a dialectic between the ‘over-structuring and de-structuring, subversion and support’ (Lecerle 1954, 3). In reality, therefore, it is essentially anti-institutional, not only because it upsets the hermeneutic codes of reader-writer structure but also because it ruptures the normative social contract. Although in the common parlance ‘nonsense’ refers to “words or actions that convey an absurd meaning or no meaning at all” (*The Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 924) but here nonsense is a purposeful, contextual game that synthesizes all the categories of parody, surrealism, absurdity and satire into a common non-entity or non-word to destabilize the structural authority – “nonsense leads us down a path of sense, only to turn aside from the expected destination at the last moment; ...” (Heyman, 2007 xxv) In this paper I would endeavor to show-case how Sukumar Ray, one of the major exponents of

second generation Bengal Renaissance, skilfully employs nonsense poetry to trace the meticulous dialectics of order/disorder locating a 'third space' of identity formation.

The 19th century colonial Bengal has witnessed a violent confrontation of two opposing forces of orthodox Hinduism, dipped in the intoxicating quagmire of age old superstitions on the one hand and the progressive transnational horizons of intellectualism on the other. The newly emergent Bengali intellectual life has, by now, reframed itself within a versatile multipolarity of thoughts and culture. The contemporary Calcutta with all its intellectual and emotional attributes ushers in a new era of artistic modernism both in the context of political and intergenerational crisis. Inspired by the waves of Renaissance and fostered by the family environment of Upen-drakishor Roy Chowdhury, Sukumar Ray establishes an unparalleled genius in fusing the genre of children's literature and ideological pattern within a singular thread of nonsense versification. In this practice, Sukumar Ray establishes a mark of authenticity not only by introducing a completely virgin area of studies into the tradition of Bengali literature but also due to the fact that he transforms the nonsense literary tradition in a way that suits the Bengali intellect in the most effective manner possible. Even though Trailokyanath Mukherjee has introduced the genre of a funny and absurd literature prior to Ray but it is in the hands of Sukumar Ray that the genre

of nonsense writing found its best exposure. I would take four poems [*The Missing Whiskers, Stew Much, Sons of Ramgaroo and Baburam – The Snake-Charmer*] from his collection *Abol-Tabol* to comprehend how the individual identity has been negotiated within the vortex of centrifugal and centripetal forces of postcolonial discourses.

It is significant to note in this context how Bhabha magnificently combines the structuralist/post-structuralist and psycho-analytic studies to build up his theory of identity formation in the postcolonial context. Bhabha's theory of 'hybridism' is a curious combination of both Lacan's and Fanon's theory of the 'other', highlighting the inherent ambivalence of White/Black binaries. This construction of stereotypes in colonial discourse anticipates a subversion of the master-narratives through a counter discourse that topples the self/other binaries of the whiteness or blackness. As Bhabha opens the ambivalent hybrid space for the subsequent subversion of a colonial master narrative we arrive at a positive response to this discourse as Benita Parry sums up "For Bhabha, the subaltern has spoken, and his readings of the colonialist text recovers a native voice." (Perry 2004, 40) When the English administrators tried to convert the 18th century Bengal into a chunk of colonial subjects, what they really aimed at was the creation of a completely new set of mimic men who would be like the Englishmen in spirit but not quite so in their essence.

This process of stereotyping is characteristically a visual metonymy which apparently mocks and undermines the prejudiced pretensions of colonial empire: “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference.” (Bhabha 1994, 86) This paves the way for a shadowy laughter through a forced assimilation of cultural mimicry and transcendence. This mimicry, in turn, marks the gap between civility and a deliberate distortion of it as Leela Gandhi substantiates:

But mimicry is also the sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. The native subject often appears to observe the political and semantic imperatives of colonial discourse. But at the same time, she systematically misrepresents the foundational assumptions of this discourse by articulating it. In effect, mimicry inheres in the necessary and multiple acts of translation which oversee the passage from colonial vocabulary to its anti-colonial usage. In other words, ‘mimicry’ inaugurates the process of anti-colonial self-differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation. (Gandhi 1999, 149-50)

At this point of “... an annihilation of relations ... to enjoy it as a delectable and infinite anarchy knowing no rules, liberating the mind from any form of order of system” (Sewell 1952, 4) we find the growing relevance of Sukumar Ray’s *‘aye re Bhola, kheyal kbola/ Matto*

madol bajiye aye.' The reference to 'Bhola' can be a double-edged allusion either to 'a forgetful and casual man living a carefree life of innocent joy' or to the simplified version of Maheswara Shiva (Bholanath) with his gesture of frenzied wisdom. Thus at the very onset with the introduction of the figure of Bhola, Ray takes us beyond the jurisdiction of all sense perception; to the realm of a nonsense worldview which finally leads us to the opening of an alternative possibility. And this immediately catches the thread of humorous presentation with which Ray would go on weaving the rest of his poems.

As Bhabha's 'hybridity' proposes an answer to Spivak's "Can the Subalterns Speak?" in an affirmative direction so Sukumar Ray projects how the subalterns have already spoken through a space of liminal in-betweenness of negotiated identity. In the poem *The Missing Whiskers* we are introduced with the stereotypical 'Boss-Babu', comfortable in his assumed security: "*Dibyi chhilen khosmejaje chair kbani chepe*" until the consciousness of his identity arises: "With muffled cries he rolled his eyes/ And threw his arms about, / 'Alas I'm sick. Come save me quick'/ Was what he sputtered out." (Ray 1984, 3) He is even reduced to a confused, dehumanized status: "But careful he might bite yet". When his 'amanuensis' 'held a mirror to his face' we see how the 'self' meets the 'other' in a metaphoric reference to the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage – that inevitable phase of transition where

the individual is caught between the turbulent waves of 'symbolic' and the 'imaginary'. This 'otherization' is terribly shocking to the stereotypical *Babu* (the prototype of the emergent *babu* class of 19th century Bengal) who can no longer identify himself with his own native people, a clan that he originally belongs to (*Shyambabu der goyla*) and meticulously 'otherizes' them. He deliberately wears the mask of a mistaken identity, a grand-narrative of the master class and his face gradually grows to it: "Man is slave, Moustache is master/ Losing which Man meets disaster!" (Ray 1984, 3). This fear of the losing of moustache, in a very subtle way, alludes to an ingrained fear of these *babu* people to lose their place in the hierarchic socio-political order of the colonial era; it is an extreme state of paranoia which compels them to cling to their posts and relevance in the eyes of the white rulers. In this feat of an extreme outrageousness the *babu* takes some drastic decisions which again refer to the arbitrariness of the colonial rulership which does not bother about anything but their flimsy whims:

Know this – in the near future
 I ought to – no, I must reduce your wages.
 This he did. And then at random
 He composed a memorandum
 Herewith quoted (minus appendages).
 If you think your employees
 Deserve your love - correction please:
 They don't. They're fools. No commonsense.
 They're full of crass incompetence.
 The ones in my establishment

Deserve the highest punishment. (Ray 1984, 3)

The poem *Stew Much* explains the “creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonization” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998, 20). With a robust refutation of the established norms: “*Byakoron mani na*” (Ray 1984, 4) it moves on to the dynamic ‘third space’, the kernel hybrid position which examines the “new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.” (Bhabha 1994, 1). The series of new species—*Porcuduck*, *Stortle* and *W halelephant*—refers to the emergence of a whole new class of Anglicized Bengali *Babu*. This ‘beastly configuration’, however, reveals “... the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (Bhabha 1994, 173). So the enormous figure of the Giraffe is decorated with the puny ‘grass-hopper’s limbs’ but, surprisingly, he is delighted with this new gift of an apparent freedom of flying. This inherent incongruity makes space for a genial laughter which, on the other hand, identifies a helpless surrender of the native culture at the altar of an alien culture. The cow (the traditional emblem of Bengali Hindu culture), gets a “frightful shock/ On finding that his lower limbs belong to a fighting cock.” (Ray 1984, 4) This figure can also be taken as suggestive of a communal sentiment aroused by the then policies of the British government (Divide and

Rule) – since the cow is a sacred emblem of Hinduism which worships it as *gomata* and the chicken and beef, the forbidden foods in Hindu culture, being the staple foods for the Muslim. Again “It’s obvious the Whalelephant is not a happy notion:/ The head goes for the jungle, while the tail turns to/ The Ocean.” (Ray 1984, 4)– one part of his identity clings to the typical orientalism as represented through the symbol of the forest and the other part instigates to follow the rules of the ocean like that of the Englishmen who are characteristically identified with their naval power. The combination of the Lion and the Deer precisely highlights an essential dichotomy of the predator-prey relationship intensifying the psychic tension that gradually negotiates the identity in a somewhat uncomfortable zone of mutuality: “The lions lack of horns distressed him greatly, so/ He teamed up with a deer - now watch his antlers/ grow!” (Ray 1984, 4)

Now we move on to the castle of the Ramgaroo—a new species born out of the literary genius of Sukumar Ray—

They live in constant fear

We believe in only grieving;
Happiness is fleeting.

The Ramgaroosian lair
Bereft of sun and air
Is doomed to be a monastery

Of permanent despair. (Ray 1984, 6)

We are reminded of Fanon's traumatizing identity crisis: "For Fanon... psychic trauma results when the colonial subject realizes that he can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, to shed the blackness that he has learnt to devalue. Bhabha amplifies this to suggest that colonial identities are always a matter of flux and agony." (Loomba 1998, 148) Here we come face to face with a paradoxical situation where the prohibition of laughter to a species arouses laughter among the readers. The humor originates from the fissure line of an inherent discrepancy where the terrible helplessness of one leads to the amusement of other:

To the sons of Ramgaroo
Laughter is taboo
A funny tale will make them wail:
We're not amused, boo - hoo! (Ray 1984, 6)

The laughter aroused in these lines is far from being a light hearted comedy and almost verges on a black humor where the vulnerability of the identity of the colonized people is once again reiterated.

I would conclude my discussion with a focus on how this agony leads to a strategic resistance and contestation threatening the roots of colonial foundation and necessitating even more vigorous assertion of the rituals of power.

However, since India's mimicry of the English blurred

the boundary between the rulers and ruled, the dream of anglicizing Indians threatened to Indianise Englishness- a reversal the colonists found intolerable. Mimicry is therefore a state of ambivalence and undermines the claims of imperial discourse and makes it impossible to isolate the racialized essence of either the colonized or the colonizer (Bhabha 1994, 506).

Thus Baburam is implored to supply snakes “*Je saap er chokh nei, / Singh nei nokh nei, / Chhote na ki haante na, / Kauke je kaate na.*” It can be identified with the de jure empire Farrukhsiyar, a snake devoid of its fang as demanded by the imperialists. In fact this has been the traditional strategy of the British Empires to install a puppet king in the fruitless throne of Indian history and through them to administer the government in their favour. Any sort of inert existence devoid of the minimum possibility of resistance is the ideal thing that they required. On the other hand it was an immediate necessity on the part of the subject class (Baburam or Farrukhsiyar) to adapt themselves according to their demands so that they can find their only way of survival. This interlocking pattern of the adversity/adaptability paved the way for a hybrid area – a comfort zone of existential crisis like that of a no man’s land where all laws are reverted and all identities lost.

As Lecercle explains, “Nonsense, therefore, is a constant effort towards mastery, towards blocking the emergence of the radically unmeant, the true or radical non-

sense of possession or delirium” (Lecerclre 1994, 134). It is this death-bed frenzy of Sukumar Ray that merges all the fine lines of sense/nonsense, order/disorder dichotomy and upholds a significant subversion of the British Empire: “Aaj k dada jabar agey/ Bolbo ja mor chitte lagey.” (Ray 1984, 10) - envisioning life-long desire for a free India, free from the claustrophobia of *Ekushey Ayin* or the tricky allurement of *Khuror Kol*, a utopian dream which can only be ensured by his final journey to the after world through the drowsy quasi-hypnotic period experienced just before one falls asleep, when images and apparently random notions may emerge and float freely.

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*A Rhetoric on
Conflicts in Akachi
Adimora-Ezeigbo's
Trafficked*

Uchena David Uwakwe

Introduction

Since rhetoric has maintained a pivotal place in literary criticism from classical epoch till the present, writers have continued to explore the possibilities of entrenching their ideologies through rhetorical emblems. In the novel, *Trafficked*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo ostensibly reclines from projecting the typical radicalized feminist personas in her trilogy: *The Last of the Strong Ones*, *House of Symbols* and *Children of the Eagle*. While an attempt is made to conjecture patterns for erecting a matriarchal stronghold in trilogy, there is a visible directional switch

in *Trafficked*. Therefore, it gives warrant to the assumption in this work that there is a maturation in the craft in *Trafficked*, as the (dis)inclination to extending her revolutionary stance on the feminist question gives place to a rhetorical strength. Therefore, it behooves the exploration of more urgent creative missions in African literature, circumstantial in relating the urgency to interrogate the interplay of these rhetorical strategies and how they are accomplished. It is imperative to examine how the writer's project mediates what sounds like a disproportionate fissure of the distant extremes of these perceptions: her-stories (feminist writings) versus he-stories (writings characterized by male-dominance), and how they all implicate the feminist matter.

While rhetoric has always been seen to apply to the art of speaking, the imperatives of the rhetorical appeals—logos, ethos and pathos—have become most expedient in accentuating the ideological frameworks in literary expression. Rhetoric was made the fulcrum of the ancient Greek curriculum, a substantive programme for nurturing the leaders of their future generations. Rhetoric pertains to the persuasive force in a text and the appreciation of its consequence on a given subject matter. Abrams and Harpham agree that “the concern of rhetoric is with the type of discourse whose chief aim is to persuade an audience to think and feel or act in a particular way” (Abrams and Harpham 2012, 342-343). In the understanding that literary creativity of compelling

merit promises a measurable affectation of substantial audience, each thematic exploration has to embrace the interests of a given era. Regarding oral and written compositions, J. A. Cuddon locates five processes of logical order; invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. In translating these rules from speech presentation to literary creativity, two of these become most desirable – ‘invention’ and ‘style’ (Cuddon 2013, 606). While ‘invention’ relates to a new discovery, or a re-discovery of an old order within a new scheme, ‘style’ entails imbuing each invention with a unique mode.

Adimora-Ezeigbo’s ‘invention’ in *Trafficked* is most logically predicated on the postcolonial confrontation with a version of slavery. While the enslaver is indicted, there is the rhetorical strategy which implicates the society that is negligent of the plots of certain villains. These deviants inadvertently extend the frontiers of slavery by exploiting the ignorance of the people as well as the indiscretion of the government. Adimora-Ezeigbo’s feminist concern is ostensibly overshadowed by other conflicts within the society which rather require a collective investment on the part of both the male and female writers of African literary kinship. The ideological installation in the novel, *Trafficked* aligns with Ann Dobie’s own exposition of Augustine’s philosophy. Dobie view is that this is but a translated perception of the world as an ordinary essence of a super-ordinate realm. It is such re-presentation of known images and themes, a lit-

erary device in giving meaning to other elevated matters. The submission here is that Augustine is concerned with how “figurative meaning looks through things, treating them as only signs of more exalted levels of truth” (Dobie 2009, 55-56).

The compelling matrix of inordinate incidents for which the likes of Nneoma yield to their traffickers, indicts the status of the members of different labour groups in Nigeria whose ‘take home pay’ can hardly take them home. Most fittingly, the portrayal of the characters’ gullibility becomes the measure of aggregate naïveté within a society in which the government proves irresponsible to the masses’ plight. These conflicts trail Nneoma’s innocence and her quest to survive and be rehabilitated after she had inadvertently procured the stigma – the *Trafficked*.

Perspectives on Adimora-Ezeigbo’s Switch

There are differing perspectives on Chinua Achebe’s switch in the characterization of women in *Anthills of the Savannah* as against the portraiture of women in his earlier novels. Consequently, Ijeoma Nwajiaku insists that the unfair mould of women in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is mediated in the circumstance of the contemporary stature and status of women and indeed the status of feminist struggles. Nwajiaku puts it thus: “That Achebe seems to have undertaken a thorough study of the female psyche is evident. For *Anthills of the Savannah*

profers a depth of insight that is at once compelling, authentic and unprejudiced” (Nwajiaku 2013, 162). Nwachukwu-Agbada, clearly, does not sweep this conflict under the carpet in affirming that “In case one thinks that this view of Achebe’s handling or mishandling of women refers to his early novels only, even his *Anthills of the Savannah* is not spared...” (Nwachukwu-Agbada 2013, 47). Nnaemeka is cited here in validating the study of transfigured characterization in Achebe’s *Anthills...* Nnaemeka’s position is that Achebe’s crime remains “the depersonalization of women” which is made to “serve no other purpose than to be made love to, breed children, prepare food, massage the men’s exploding ego and most importantly, remain SILENT” (Nnaemeka 1990, 282).

In another submission, Nwachukwu-Agbada draws attention to the compelling progression of Achebe’s characterization. This argument comes with a determined purpose to highlight the natural tendency of writers’ maturation, particularly in the face of critical conflagrations. This idea relates significantly to Akachi Ezeigbo’s progressive portrayal of women, as such culmination comes in *Trafficked*. While explaining the move in Ayi Kwei Armah’s novels: *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born* (1968), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978). Nwachukwu-Agbada also refers to Ngugi Wa Thiong’O’s novels in which the women are transformed from the crying ‘mothers’ of Njoroge in *Weep Not Child*

(1964) to the gun-wielding Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* (1982) (Nwachukwu-Agbada 2013, 47).

Citing Stratton's view, Sophia Ogwude responds to the allegation that Achebe legitimizes the exclusion of women from politics in the postcolony by consciously adopting the Igbo pre-colonial setting. Ogwude also counters Adimora-Ezeigbo's charge on Achebe as one of the "notable male novelist who had formerly relegated women's experience" (Ogwude 2013, 119). The argument here is predicated on the key actions which Achebe bequeaths to women in *Things Fall Apart*. One of these, she argues, is seen in the kind of freedom which Achebe bestows on Ekwefi, Okonkwo's wife who had abandoned Okonkwo for the wealthier Anene but returned to marry Okonkwo later. The logic supposes that women cannot be said to be objects of subjugation. Somewhat, like Nwachukwu-Agbada, Ogwude insists that, "what Achebe has done, especially in the depiction of women is consistent with his practice in earlier novels" (Ogwude 2013, 119).

Furthermore, Nwachukwu-Agbada's summation of the gambit in the Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy is that,

The three novels are interrelated, featuring major characters, largely females, who belong to the same genealogy but who represent different prongs of the battle against patriarchy. Thus it is the same 'war of the sexes' running over generations, each generation faced with its challenges. In other words, it is 'herstory' told in three eras

of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings (Nwachukwu-Agbada 2011, 87).

Another suggestion which Nwachukwu-Agbada relates in his appraisal of “daughteronomy” is that Adimora-Ezeigbo proposes matriarchy or daughtriarchy as agreeable alternative to the common outlook of patriarchy, indeed a reversal of the abiding order. In spite of relating the concept, “daughteronomy”, as a mere pun which plays on the wording of the fifth book of the Bible, Nwachukwu-Agbada seems to extend this derivation to the scriptural paradigm, proposing the practical institution of the laws that had gone before in the Biblical books – *Exodus* and *Leviticus*. This view on *Children of the Eagle* does not just relate the annexation of Adimora-Ezeigbo’s personas in the first two books of the trilogy, but also projects the entirety of feminist dictates that had gone forth to annul all appurtenances of masculinity and accompanying primogeniture. The entrenchment of this position gives a clue to Adimora-Ezeigbo’s intent on the directional switch in *Trafficked*. This switch is also prominently adopted in Chimamanda Adichie’s own writings, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. It is cushy to find Adichie’s reluctance in furthering the heat of the feminist burden which her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* bears. Similarly, the ferocity in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s trilogy is singed in what is perceived as the ‘maturation’ (or progression) of her craft in *Trafficked*. It may be viewed as an ideological coalition aimed at at dousing the feminist rage in African literature.

Language Conflict as Rhetorical Strategy

The commonplace presentation of the initial situation as the plot trigger in literary creativity gives the justification for appreciating Adimora-Ezeigbo's rhetorical stratagem. Evidently, the attention of the reader is sustained through the consternations which conflicts impose on the text, *Trafficked*. Ultimately, her 'Snail Sense' rhetoric effuses in the language of the text which becomes the tool for mediating in intrinsically submerged clashes, particularly crucial to feminist extrapolation. The rhetorical game in Adimora-Ezeigbo's craft effuses in the concatenation of symbols implicating matters with which she lends practical existence to the 'Snail Sense' theory. In this regard, the trafficking business evokes the pool of postcolonial woes, among which is a post-cultural view of masculinity, the feminist agitation for empowerment and all the attendant consequences. The author's employment of rhetorical strategies simply comes through the subtlety of language whose objective is to produce the desired persuasive effect, especially in the face of abiding conflagrations.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's 'Snail Sense' theory derives from the Igbo mythical proverb, *ire oma ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu* – it is with a sweet tongue that the snail treads the thorny path. While the tongue remains the constant organ in speech articulation, it does not only touch on language use as it were, but the several adoptions which draw on rhet-

oric whenever and wherever a journey is made across conflicts. 'Ire oma' (sweet tongue) assumes a mythical tenor, with implications of appropriateness in language use. It also seems to call attention to the probabilities of the misuse, the abuse of language which linguists have had to engage in the discourse of speech act and verbal hygiene. The language which the writer bestows on to the characters gives the clues to her purpose, explicating certain myths which draw from the Igbo culture and subverting the others. These are visible in that the patterns of dialogue which the narrative in *Trafficked* also employs.

In *Trafficked* therefore myths are divulged and subverted with emblematic hint that the obscurities which attend key conflicts in Africa require to be given some attention. Among these are the feminist and religious conflicts. Also, government structures, policy implementation and activities seem to be drawn against the operations of the Non-Governmental Organisations whose schemes come as a palliative to the shortcomings of the governments in power. And indeed, they give inkling to a convergence of the psychological wranglings which allude to the present day versions of slavery and all propellants of postcolonial matters. These are the issues which the author highlights in varied modes of contrast. The complexity of mediation suggested in the twist in Ofomata's psyche as revealed here:

He wondered why he had come to the university to study instead of going into trading or...Should he return to his father's lucrative palm oil mill and palm kernel-cracking industries in Ihite-Agu and forget this pursuit of a degree in Estate Management?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 28-29).

From personal psychological conflicts, the author's focus extends to interpersonal interactions as well as divergent ideals which generate different levels of entanglements that are not far removed from cultural (dis)orientations. An instance comes as Ofomata's lecturer berates him thus:

"Sit down," Dr Komolafe said. "Do you want to make people come to my office when I'm already late going home? Is it not your people's belief that when a visitor is not offered a seat, he will attract more visitors to his host" he laughed.

"Yes I think there is a belief like that." Ofomata shrugged. (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 30).

The perceptions of variance here include; host versus visitor, the command to sit down at the beginning of the statement versus the laugh at its end, the disclosure of the listener's belief against the speaker's, and the fact that the listener does not appear to believe what he accepts as his people's philosophy. Dr Komolafe simply expresses shock at such interface again and concludes that "The large number of superstitions still circulating in our technology-driven society is astonishing" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 28-29).

Other superstitious beliefs are presented in a hyperbolic design, drawing attention to myths that require to be subverted. Nneoma is made to invite their village god of sleep, Oroua, from Ihite-Agu to the Oasis NGO rehabilitation camp in her desperation to overcome her raging thoughts. Ironically, Fola who had no such belief, (in any god of sleep) slept with ease. Fola in her own sleep, is pictured as she “changed gear and zoomed off” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 78-79). But for Nneoma, she begins a new journey of thoughts into her past memory and could only find sleep almost at dawn “after the clock had chimed four” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 79). The author’s rhetorical tone indicates how the “unpredictable” and “mischievous Oroua” (the god of sleep) had “eventually got tired of playing a game with Nneoma” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 79).

The depiction of superstitions and rumours are made to lie against certain perspectives of myths, emotively alluding to the need for their subversion. In a given context, the non-payment of gratuities to civil servants who had long been retired proved to be one of those conflicts for which many dispensations of the Nigerian government are arraigned. Nneoma’s father, Ogukwe becomes a victim of an unconfirmed rumour – that the retirees were summoned for the payment of their gratuity. Ogukwe, elderly as he was, and with aching arthritis, had suffered immensely after embarking on a fruitless long journey to Enugu, in a bid to get his pay (gratuity). Ogukwe had

only been drowned in the summit of his great expectation. The conversation in the Ogukwe family had revealed their apprehension thus: “I don’t trust our government. Look at the teacher’s strike nothing has been done about it. But it is the federal government and not the state government” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 110).

More emphatic is the parallelism on the grip of delusion that precedes such wasted long journeys, a visible parallel to the illusion of the trafficked girls, their wasted adventure and their eventual deportation. At long last, Ogukwe exclaims here, “It was a rumour... just a rumour. There was no invitation to assemble; no money was paid. We gathered for nothing. As usual, they sent the police to scatter us... Let dog lick the eyes of whoever started this rumour” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 112). As it is for the trafficked lot, Adimora-Ezeigbo’s contempt ostensibly lies more with the acceptance of these misleading rumours than with those who initiated or spread them. The proverb which had been made to come earlier in the novel aptly foreshadows events of this kind where blames are inordinately apportioned. In the proverb, “A foolish chicken overlooked the knife that cut its throat and got angry with the pot that cooked it” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 4), there is a projection in Nneoma’s outburst of anger as the stewardess expresses resentment at the trafficked girls. Also, this proverb applies to the circumstance of Ogukwe’s fit of anger against the initiators of the rumour. It is supposed that

the narrator rather anticipates the measure of self-indictment for such gullibility. Morally speaking, this ought to birth the process of rehabilitation for persons, and most probably the nation at large.

In spite of the writer's attempt to subvert certain myths, her employment of the oral tradition comes to sustain certain practices which enshrine cautions in traditional Igbo society. Adimora-Ezeigbo explicates the proverb, "It is not every fruit that is good to the eyes that is good to the belly", by recalling the story which Hannah's grandmother had told her. The kernel of the story goes thus: "The excreta swelled and swelled until it turned into a handsome young man... All the maidens wanted him as a husband. Finally the young demon, who had told the villagers that he was a prince, chose seven of them and took them away" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 209). Much more, the caution comes in the song accompaniment to the folktale – "Who are you following/ the magic bird is asking/ are you following excreta" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 209). Once again, the conflicting view of myths comes into focus, suitably analogous to the gullibility of the trafficked girls and the consequences of yielding to abominable people, much like the 'dispelled excreta' – the demon.

Fittingly, Adimora-Ezeigbo chooses proverbs that are laden with mythical sense in generating a justifiable link with the events that had gone before. Each is made to

lend vigour to the preceding context. In Ogukwe's proverb, there is endemic rhetoric "Our people say that when something is done and done properly, it brings peace and pleasure to the heart and to the mind" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 260). Here, in 'Our people say', tribute is significantly paid to the timeless authorship of traditional wit, its rhetorical essence and the communality of its possession. The consequence of Adimora-Ezeigbo's rhetoric appears to portend conciliation for the erstwhile decimated patrilineal order.

Conflict in the Historicist Perspective

Adimora-Ezeigbo's portrayal of trafficking as a gruesome postcolonial signpost also stands as certain tribute to history. Its posture here relates how the slavery of the past has transmuted into the postcolonial woes prevalent in the Africa of today. There is the determined renaissance to history which betrays a plot that is not in any way accidental. This obvious in the reference to episodes in Ofomata's university hostel, 'Jaja Hall'. They are insightful of the travails of King Jaja of Opobo in the early challenge with the colonial warlords. The author evenly immortalises this historical event thus:

The Jaja Hall was the biggest male hall of residence on campus. It was named after Jaja of Opobo, who had presided over a prosperous kingdom in the southeastern part of the country in the nineteenth century until the British Colonial Administration dethroned him, sacked and

looted his kingdom and deported him to the West Indies, where he died in ignominy (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 60-61).

This reference does not only give inkling to the prominence in the privatization of the campus hostel management, but much more, the capitalist machinations of present government surge forth as earlier precursors of colonialism and slavery. This simulacrum of authoritarian rule in the humiliation and enslavement of Jaja of Opobo comes up in clear terms in other episodes in the narrative just as the symbolism is lucid in the deportation of the trafficked girls. The narrative voice reveals here that, “She and the fifteen humiliated young women shuffled out of the aircraft, past the crew who stood aside, watching them as if they were lepers or slaves disembarking from a slave ship” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 4) The twin qualifiers, ‘lepers/slaves’, implicate the narrator’s view of trafficking, the sex trade and other accompanying vices. The metaphor of the alienation of lepers in the face of the disease, that inflicts its rancor beyond control, also incriminate the coercion of the traffickers, much like the slave masters who incarnated the colonialists. Much more intriguing in the narrative is the reality that the perpetrators of the act are rarely unmasked.

In the novel, there are multiple pictures of conflicts that come with a lot more emphasis on the despotism of the colonial era.

A thunderstorm was brewing; winds from the four corners of the town converged and collided, sending dust and dead leaves into the air. It was as if Ihite-Agu was experiencing a locust invasion, the type that last occurred in 1942, when Hitler's war was raging and young men were being sent to Burma, by the white man who ruled Onitsha, the then headquarters of Onitsha Province (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 113).

It is with the religious crises in the conjoint setting of the novel, Ihite-Agu that Adimora-Ezeigbo accentuates the charge against the historicity of Nigeria within the spate of conflicts which the novel recollects. Perhaps, it is to sustain the logic that a given outrage results in a susceptibility to extended abominations. The narrator likens this atrocious situation to a combined infliction of (*ibi*, the scrotum disease) and *afo otuto* {a distended belly} (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 44), twin maladies which in the traditional Igbo society condemn the victim to be thrown into the evil forest. Such implication of trafficking, as abominable alienation, touches on slavery as well. The outrage on slavery is visible in Efe's confession to Nneoma here,

Madam Gold sold me to a pimp – a white man – after four years of slaving for her. I worked for my 'new owner' for two years before I escaped. Then I fled to Verona and teamed up with a prostitute I met there and worked independently for about another year because I wanted to save up money to return home.... Then the police arrested me and I was deported (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 100).

While such mercantilist spirit (with and of humans) is made explicit, it provokes the harrowing sting on the casualties' psyche. Nneoma's acquiesces to Efe's story, very much like her own story, confirming the relatedness of the consequences as well as the precursors to the trafficking involvement. The complicity to each event of enslavement becomes clearer to both Efe and Nneoma as they relate their experiences to each other. That these victims only allow themselves to be deluded is seen in the fact that Efe willingly enslaves herself again with another prostitute even after she was being liberated from her initial 'trafficked' status.

The similarity in the names of the villains of the trafficking enterprise, 'Madam Gold' and 'Madam Dollar', does not just implicate deluded identity, it also reflects the allurements and entrapment for their trafficking venture. It is the same portraiture that Efe gives of Baron—"He's a cheat and a heartless exploiter like many Westerners and a corrupt hustler like many Africans—a thoroughbred Englishman and a typical son-of-the-soil Nigerian" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 136). The revelation of Baron's parentage—"English father" and "Nigerian mother", represents the geneological admixture that attributes the stronger force of evil to the colonizer, and particularly some kind of initiation that accounts for the postcolonial conflicts in the Nigerian setting.

In all, Adimora-Ezeigbo seems inclined to restoring Nneoma to her undefiled state before the deportation, just as the personality of King Jaja of Opobo is seen to be reclaimed within this retrospection, the encounter with the colonial conquerors. Therefore, while the period of trafficking represents the colonial era, another epoch is evoked with boarding the trafficked girls at the rehabilitation camp, indeed a time for understanding how their delusion had come about. However, Nneoma's progress in the period of her rehabilitation represents the positive view that some delinquents are able to overcome their past, and chart a new course in their lives.

Religion in Conflicting Dispositions

There is a seeming intent to de-mystify religion and de-mythify the objects and the places of worship. A metaphor is spun in the conflict which ensues with the trafficking of the gods of Ihite-Agu. Here is a situation which does not only implicate the complicity of Africans in the devaluation of their tradition and culture, but one that also echoes the bait which draws Africans into colluding with their own slave traders. The reason given for selling the images of the gods, another mis-acculturation, is that, "Some people said they will sell them to white people. I heard the white people are called *ati kolekito*... 'art collectors'" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 40). Nonetheless, the conflict resulting from the trafficking of the gods of Ihite-Agu disparage such religious senti-

ments whipped up for perverted intents. From the dialogue between Ogukwe and Alagbogu in which it is affirmed that ‘religion has lost its true meaning’, both men agree that it has become “a source of making money and exercising political and psychological power over others, especially the poor and the weak” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 275).

The displacement and trafficking of the gods presuppose the impotence and the lifelessness of these deities. There is a fitting transfer of epithet in the transmittal from the abduction of humans to the trafficking of the gods of the Ihite-Agu land. There are measures to which the abominable acts of enslavement are spiritualized, especially with their evident consequences. In the writer’s ploy here, the potency of the altars from which the deities are abducted is repudiated. The impotence of the gods also supposes the appraisal of delusion in their patronage. This is emphasized in the abductor’s recourse to oaths, at varied altars and in compelling conditions, driving the ignorant folks to abide by strange deeds and agreements. The writer reveals these in the confessions of Efe and Nneoma respectively;

None of the men who were interviewed was taken. That should have alerted me to danger, but I barely gave it a thought at the time. Anyway, before long, all the girls – ten of us – were given our travel schedule. We took an oath to work for the agency until we had paid our debts (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 99).

As usual, both casualties did not only have similar stories but the same terms of agreement and consequences of their breach. However, it is in Nneoma's own confession that the locales of the altars are captured in the dialogue that assumes part of the narratology here,

Efe stopped her with a question. "Where was the oath taken? In a shrine?"

"No, they used the Bible and an image of an arusi."

In my case, they took us to a shrine somewhere between Lagos and Ibadan" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 128).

In matching the *Bible* and arusi the writer intensifies the view of religions in conflicting disposition. Much of the conflicts pertaining to the sects seem to relegate the influence of the deities which these religions represent. Rather, the confrontations are manifest in the abominable actions of their adherents.

Hannah, living with Prophet Elias without any bride price paid on her head; Hannah, joining the gang that destroyed the shrine of arusi Udo; Hannah, abandoning her parents and siblings and St John Anglican Church where she was baptized, and running to the founder of a Satanic religion (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 44).

The name, arusi Udo (god of peace or peaceful god), is not only significant in alluding to the likely consequences of distorting the serenity of the people's life and cul-

ture in the guise of new religions, the writer ostensibly berates the fanaticism which has become a product of Western ideals. Worse pictures are propped up of this consequence in the Nigerian society here,

Muslim rioters attacked churches in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, at the end of the Jumat service on Friday, burning down more than twenty buildings. They killed many Christians with machetes, axes and bows and arrows. Some were stabbed to death in the churches where they had taken refuge (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 90-91).

The view of religion as ‘the opium of the people’, Marxist in its tenor, underlies Adimora-Ezeigbo’s rhetoric of conflicts. Prophet Elias is made the embodiment of these conflicts. Hannah testifies, “He says Jesus whipped sinners who desecrated the temple, so he’s simply emulating the Master. Women are not exempted. After whipping us, he invites us to his bed” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 182). These conflicts are not only multifarious, but also ironical of the status of delusion at different levels in the society.

The Government in Conflicting Dispositions

There are several pictures which betray Adimora-Ezeigbo’s indictment of the structures of government in Nigeria. Indeed, these come to provoke the reader’s appraisal of the state of affairs in many of the countries where the transference into the postcolonial epoch appears to broaden the conflicts that had earlier been

generated. Again the writer employs very pertinent symbolism in generating the rhetorical force.

Ofomata looked up from time to time to watch the heavy traffic on the Mainland Bridge which had been constructed by one of the military governments that ruled the country between 1966 and 1999 – except for the four intervening years between 1979 and 1983, when President Shehu Shagari became the first democratically elected president. But the soldiers had overthrown him and taken over again as if to rule was their birthright. Civilians were back in power now but little had changed really... (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 35).

The ‘bridge’ picture does not only stand as metaphor for the broadening conflicts, indeed misrule, from one dispensation of government to the other, it also highlights the insatiable appetite for power in the hint to the ‘rulers’ birthright’. In this regard, the allusion to Obasanjo, the most prominent in this matter of the ‘rulers’ birthright, supports the writer’s recourse to the historical events, in the light of the metaphorical bridge. Remotely, the case of Odi community which Obasanjo’s (supposed) democratic rule destroyed, with the aggressive mode of the military, the auspices under which he had taken the first mantle of headship in the country. It is the conflict in Ihite-Agu that provides the opportunity for the reference to the Odi matter here, “The police will arrest them and sack Ihite-Agu as they did in Odi, that unfortunate town in Bayelsa State. Or was it soldiers that did it?” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 220). In this, the logic of the

narrator's allusion to the years, "1966 and 1999" ingrains and the inordinate employment of force, indeed the abuse of authority (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 242-243). Also, the bridge easily points to the actions of all the governments from the days of slavery to the colonial era where warrant chiefs were imposed to wreck havoc on the citizenry. In *Trafficked*, sufficient attention is drawn to the spate of corrupt practices that indict the state of endorsed disorder – organized crime (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 35).

The author refuses to portray the goings-on at the departure airports in Nigeria, from where the trafficked girls usually take off. However, another rhetorical approach is put to use in pointing to the apathetic stance of the government on security matters. The Edo Governor is made to represent the government's negligence on the trafficking matter. The same apathetic outlook is made to pervade all the dispensations of government. Visibly, the government's insensitivity to the plight of the common people is evident in student's protests on campus. This demonstration enjoyed support even from non-students who enthuse that, "I think that the students were justified in protesting. Why are we surprised that so many young people want to leave this country?" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 178). Another evidence of the capricious leadership is seen in the attitude to infrastructural debilitation here, "and the road had been tarred since she left home, though it was already badly pot-

holed” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 245). In depicting the loss of government credibility and authority, the matter resonates in the Ihite-Agu case as Lebechi persistently refuses to comply with the verdicts of the Umunna (kith and kin) on the family conflicts.

Much more, the activities of parallel institutions like the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s), do not indeed fair better in their activities. While they are set up to intervene, most often with government support, it appears in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s consideration that not much of the anomies are mediated. To a certain extent, the strengths of the NGO’s are seen in their rehabilitation of the victims of trafficking and the empowerment skills they are made to pursue (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 52). The rules in their camps also afford the inmates the opportunity to follow the paths of discipline. However, the inadequacies in the affairs of the NGO’s are perceived as lacking depth because of the loose acquaintance with the key challenges that brew these conflicts. The awareness of the NGO’s is made to compare with the women who saw the trafficked girls heading for their bus to the rehabilitation camp. Nneoma’s irritation gives the appraisal here: “Those two women had spoken from ignorance...Did they know the condition that drove girls from the country to Europe. They should find out how the girls became trafficked in the first place before opening their smelly mouths” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 23).

Nneoma is rather humiliated by the ironic proclamation by the Commissioner for Women Affairs that, “We have declared war against slavery, child abuse, the international sex trade and HIV/AIDS. What is hardly seen is the weapon with which this war is fought. Much like the Commissioner, the Director of UNICEF came to the event with posters which seem to only define these problems,

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS THE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE FROM PLACE TO PLACE, WITHIN AND ACROSS BORDERS AND THROUGH FORCE, COERCION OR DECEPTION AND INTO SITUATIONS INVOLVING THEIR ECONOMIC AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 56).

An appraisal of this inscription is that a mere definitive approach submerges the expected pro-activity of these international bodies which profess to bring relief to these challenges, perhaps an attempt to suggest a mistrusted commitment. In *Children of the Eagle* there is a further revelation of the Adimora-Ezeigbo’s mistrust for the NGO business,

Nnenna reminds her other sisters as they take a march round the village, “You remember Adanna had to leave her university job to form a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Her action was a result of the harrowing experience she went through in her university, especially in her department” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 203).

This perspective does not only reveal the unpreparedness of the initiators of these NGOs, it also recollects the unemployment status as well as the counter-productive attitude and deprecation of labour in Nigeria. Nneoma's sack at the skill acquisition centre gives the indication of the denigration of the labour force, and for which there was no intervention on the part of the NGOs. It is not in doubt that the NGO's lacked the requisite authority to accomplish certain goals. Again, their reluctance in effecting the arrest of Baron or any attempt at all to investigate the activities of the plotters of the trafficking business, stands as another indictment against the NGOs. However, the university set up and the treatment of Dr Komolafe matter – the diligent actions of ascertaining the involvements of the offenders by setting up a panel reveals how sanity may be obtained within an institution in which there is seriousness in maintaining law and order (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 106).

Adimora-Ezeigbo berates the government of today as not being different from the oppressive slave merchants and the antecedent groups of missionaries who bridged the gap between slavery and imperialism. Much more, the government is indicted for not being able to reconcile much of the volatile matters that impinge on peaceful co-existence. In this regard also, the key thematic disposition in the *Trafficked* aligns with what Nwajiaku had observed about Achebe's choice of Beatrice and Elewa. Although Nwajiaku's charge denounces all

forms of “subjugation and intimidation”, her reference to Kolawole mellows the feminist rancor and rather underscores the need “to unite with men in a concerted effort to reject racist and imperialist subjugation” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 162). In this recognition, Adimora-Ezeigbo seems to have become more sensitive of imperialist manipulations in several cloaks, even in the present day society. This visibly relates her penchant for traditionalism and the rhetorical experimentation with theorizing ‘snail sense’ feminism.

Conclusion

There is sufficient proof that the rhetoric in *Trafficked* is intent on mediating the feminist conflict. Quite unlike Adimora-Ezeigbo’s belligerent female characters in the trilogy, the writer’s grit on the amiable relationship of the man and the woman is apparent. Adaeze is dutiful in cooking for the husband and calls him, “Nnamukwu” (my lord) (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 110). Yet, when the man’s own delusion breeds disillusionment, such as overwhelms him into alcoholism, the woman’s rage is rather commended as a form of desirable psychotherapy. The man, Ogukwe is made to appreciate his wife’s efforts and status in providing the needs of the family, “Thank you, my wife. What can I do without you who have practically become the breadwinner in this house?” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 109). While it must be observed that the narrative is not entirely bereft of feminist echoes, they have indeed been mediated.

The writer apparently portrays conflicts that pertain more to the postcolonial question than to the feminist entanglement. While these are notable as ideological engagements that confront different levels of marginalization and their probable extension, the concentration of conflicts that pertain to the postcolony only reveals Adimora-Ezeigbo's tenor switch in *Trafficked*. It becomes imperative to undertake a reading of the novel in the light of Olaniyan's view of the portrayal of another era – the postcolonial epoch, “time-space after colonialism, what greater evidence of its inapplicability to Africa can we find than the continent's world-historical debt peonage to its former colonizers...” (Olaniyan 2007, 637). The narrative course in *Trafficked* maintains a logical synergy with the transcendence of slavery. This is emphasized in the confrontation between Jaja of Opobo and the earlier Western incursion into Africa. Nwahunanya affirms the capitalist drive in the enslavements of the pre-colonial Igbo as it is situated in the trafficking venture which Ezeigbo portrays, “With the coming of transatlantic slave trade however, slavery became a strictly commercial venture, and groups like the Aro exploited their existing advantaged position to increase their slaving activities” (Chinyere Nwahunanya 2007, 323). These capitalist temperaments are drawn in visible symbolic presentations. The symbolism in selling the Ihite-Agu god and goddess in the guise of art collection effuses with apt rhetoric drawing a parallel with the trafficking enterprise.

Another view of the symbolic depiction of the Irite-Agu god and goddess defines a new consciousness. The relationship between Adaeze and Ogukwe is incisive in this regard, just as the scenes which picture the acquiescence of Nneoma and Ofomata to an eventual marriage relationship. The willingness of these lovebirds to resurrect their erstwhile acquaintance, for which the bride price had been paid six years earlier, bears the writer's motive in resolving all erupting conflicts. It is indeed a rejection of the coercion and sexual abuse which attend the *Trafficked* victims. Moreover, with the pursuit of learning, Ofomata and Nneoma are positioned in their rightful psyche to decide the course to pursue, even in the circumstance of resolving the conflicts that had escalated from the paths of naiveté, of the citizenry, and grievous irresponsibility of the government. While the novel ostensibly berates the slaving enterprise, there is this combined statement that supposes annihilating, or at best moderating the feminist charge on the patrilineal order.

The title, *Trafficked*, is eponymous of the challenges which Nneoma the protagonist is made to undergo. And, the view of superstition in the Igbo name nne oma 'the father's reincarnated mother', gives an early lead to the view of myths and the consequences of delusion insinuated in the novel. It also provokes the novel's essence, implicating the socio-political structure which also interrogates alienation and the compelling circumstances

preceding each delusive oversea adventure. The lure to the sex trade is presented in this novel as metaphor for the slavery of pre-colonial origin. To this extent, there are measures of indictment on the bourgeois/proletariat structure, another consequence of the colonial formation. In the challenges which give vent to the pull for greener pastures overseas, Nneoma becomes the victim of the extension of such set-up.

Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo unifies her theme, setting and characterization as appurtenances for her 'invention'. Ultimately, sexism and the trafficking of women surge forth drawing from the society's view of 'womanity' as sex agents/merchants, yet it is the woman, re-presented here in Nneoma, that re-defines her status. The conflicts which drive the narratology visibly relate the kind of psychic deformation of diverse delinquents in society whose reformation become most urgent.

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*Dehumanizing the Arab
Other: A Case Study of
Diana Abujaber's Ara-
bian Jazz and Fadia
Faqir's My Name is Salma*

Dalal Sarnou

Introduction

The growing tension between nations, countries, religions and ethnic groups has strongly marked the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st. In world politics, it is presumed that the Western hegemony has not come to an end with the expansion of globalization. On the contrary, as the Egyptian scholar Hassan Hanafi (2009) argues, “[g]lobalization is Western hegemony.” To put this into perspective, globalization must be seen as “one of the common forms of Western hegemony, not only achieved through military action

or the economy but also, the market.” In the words of Hanafi: “Globalization is not just the Westernization of the world as a concept of dissemination from the core to the periphery. Nor is it mere Americanization, as the USA is now the only existing bloc which challenges the rest of the world ” (Hanafi 2009). Globalization is one of the forms of “western hegemony based on the laws of the market and military power, a concept which goes back to former imperialism” (Ibid).

The West, by which I refer to the United States and Europe, has long dominated the world. For centuries, western nations had the predominant ability to expand their power by land, sea and, later, air and technological progress. Hakim Adi adds that what might be regarded as “the domination of Europe might more properly be seen as the rise to dominance of the capitalist economic system” (The BBC History Magazine, 2016). Additionally, the technological advancements manipulated and promoted by western countries (and Japan) have made globalization one of the common forms of western hegemony.

The practice of deploying the developing countries’ capitalist economy , technological advancements, cultural imperialism and therefore globalization in its broadest sense to influence developing countries, instead of using direct political and military powers is what many scholars like Jean-Pal Sartre (1964), Kwame Nkrumah (1965),

Noam Chomsky (1979) and Edward Said (1993) call ‘neocolonialism’, and it is via in this new type of colonialism that the ex-colonizer exercises its power upon the ex-colonized to exploit the latter but in new and different ways: culturally, economically and technologically. Neocolonialism is regarded by many thinkers and historians as the same old story of racism, white supremacy and western imperialism (Chomsky 1979, Said 1993). Joe Feagin, in his work *Racist America: roots, current realities and future reparations*, explains this desire of whites to protect the white supremacist order in the United States as follows: “systemic racism is not just about the construction of racial images, attitudes, and identities. It is even more centrally about the creation, development and maintenance of white privilege, economic wealth, and sociopolitical power over nearly four centuries” (Feagin 2000, 21).

With this in mind, one should note that over the last two decades or so, racial discrimination against Arabs as an ethnic minority group, and against Muslims as a religious minority group, in most Western host countries and in western mainstream media, has led to falsified and perverted characterizations of these human beings as bloody religious fanatics endangering world peace. Muslims and/or Arabs are therefore being dehumanized. Moreover, recent terrorist attacks in European and American cities have increased the phobia and bigotry against Muslims and Arabs. Paris, London, Brussels,

Oregon, Virginia and many other Western cities were attacked by jihadis (fighters in the name of Islam) of the so-called Alqaaida and later ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and Levantine), and this has helped spread the worst image of Muslims in the West since the last century. With Trump's unexpected victory in the 2016 US presidential elections, the rise of populism in Europe, and of far-right ideologies in many places of the world, and the ban of Islamic garments in a number of European countries, Muslims and/or Arabs are experiencing increasing discrimination and xenophobia, particularly immigrants, refugees and exiled subjects who may be referred to as nomadic subjects (Braidotti 1994); this is an idea that will be evoked in the following sections of my article.

It is no surprise that this long-standing xenophobia against Arabs, Muslims, Middle Eastern and even South Asian people, has rapidly accelerated of late, in many Western countries. In recent years, mainly after the 9/11 events, the propaganda against Islam and its people has created a false sense of association between evil, terrorism, hatred and Muslims/Arabs. In this respect, Edward Said notes in *Orientalism* (1978) that the West promotes a deep-rooted hatred for Islam. The term "Islam" as it is used today is in fact part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. Today "Islam" is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, in the wake of recent bloody events in the Middle East, notably the Arab spring and

its aftermaths, Arabs and/or Muslims have caught European and American attention so strongly, that Islam has now become a primary focus area of the Western media: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently made it known. “However this coverage is misleading, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances “Islam” has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility” (Bhat 2015, 30).

Consequently, the racial discrimination of Arab immigrants has been subject to criticism in many Anglophone Arab writers’ literary works and those of women writers in particular. In fact, Arab Anglophone women’s writings may be categorized as minor and/or minority literature. As immigrant/diasporic writings, these narratives fall primarily into the category of minor literatures, because a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that, which a minority constructs within a major language, as it is in the case of English writings produced by Arab immigrants, or Americans and/or British citizens of Arabic descent, that share the characteristics of minority literatures. “Such literatures”, for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1986), have three main characteristics: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation”

(Dalal Sarnou 2014, 54). To explain further, “Deleuze and Guattari’s theory traces the figures of immigrants who stand between the culture of origin and that of the adoptive country. Immigrants are equipped with a first-hand knowledge of both cultures and they assume the role of mediators, interpreters and cultural translators” (ibid).

As a matter of fact, giving voice to marginalized ethnic minorities has become, as such, a priority for diasporic Arab writers, particularly those living in Europe and the United States where racism against ethnic minorities still persists. In the United States alone, an unprecedented Arabophobic and Islamophobic ill-treatment of migrant communities of diverse origins mis-recognized as Arabs—including Pakistanis, Afghanis, Indians and Amazighs (Berbers of North African countries like Morocco and Algeria who are not of Arab origin)—has been marked recently. One should note that like many other ethnic terms, “Arab” is notoriously difficult to define. According to Bernard Lewis, Arabs are not a nationality in the legal sense. Therefore, “it may be irrelevant and irrational to refer to communities of immigrants coming from the countries of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region as Arabs” (Lewis 1993, 6). Moreover, the Syrian refugee crisis has brought into question the “Arabness” of the Arab world: while thousands of Syrian refugees have fled to Europe and Canada in search of asylum, they are far from welcome in the neighboring countries

of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Bahrain, the Emirates or the other Gulf states (see Françoise De Bel-Air, 2015 http://gulfmigration.eu/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2015_11.pdf).

In order to expose how Arab and Muslim migrants are often dehumanized, two selected novels, written respectively, by the Arab American, Diana Abujaber, and the British Arab, Fadia Faqir, will be read with a focus on the authors' intention to voice the exclusion of Arab and Muslim immigrant groups in the West. I shall also argue that Anglophone Arab writers have assumed the responsibility of voicing the belittlement and vilification of Arabs to expose untold truths about Arabness and Muslimness and to unveil the many paradoxes of European/Western humanism.

In an effort to interrogate the fallacious, deceptive and biased representation of Arabs in a post-modern and/or neo-humanist era, and to deconstruct the use of the term "Arab" to refer to a non-homogenous ethnic minority of people coming from the Middle East, my paper offers a critical reading of fictional works produced by Anglophone Arab writers, focusing on the depiction of various female Arab characters in these texts. My intention is to examine issues of gender and race discrimination. The selected works include Diana Abujaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007). It will be highlighted through the analysis of

these novels that there is a biased misrepresentation and exclusion of immigrants who come from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region and are racially considered not quite white, and thus, not quite human. In what follows, I am going to reflect upon the whiteness dilemma of Arab immigrants (and Arab Americans in particular), as that is one of the major concerns of Diana Abujaber's *Arabian Jazz*. In analyzing the novel, a number of polemical issues related to Arabness vs. Americanness will be investigated.

Arabs: not quite white, then not quite human

Diana Abujaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) foregrounds the bitter journey of the Arab community's displacement and relocation to America. Abujaber, among many other fourth generation Arab American novelists, highlights the Arab American subject's daily experiences of race-based exclusion and anti-Arab bigotry. In fact, it is the precarious position which Arabs have long occupied in the ethnic and racial discourses in the US that has nourished much of the Arab American narrative. As a minority group, it has often been very difficult to reinscribe this community within a feasible ethnic frame. As for other ethnic minorities, skin color has been one of the major characteristics on the basis of which African Americans, Asian Americans and Latin Americans have been ethnically categorized in the United States. However, the cultural assimilation of Arabs in the US has always

been challenging for Arabs whose existence in America dates back to more than a century ago (Almaleh, 2009). The Arab minor community has not been fully visible only and mainly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks which dragged Arabs and Muslims into a zone of accusation and exclusion. As Nadine Naber (2008, 1) states, up until the horrific attacks of September 2001, several Arab American writers used the trope of “invisibility” to refer to the place of Arab Americans within dominant US discourses on race and ethnicity.

As a multicultural country, America was long seen as a mosaic, melting pot nation. However, it has been recognized on many occasions, that the US is ethnocentric as it often considers the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture, its whiteness and religion as superior to other ethnic and religious groups (see Naber, 2008). However, this may oppose the fact that there is a forced process of glocalization¹ and hybridization of the culture of the diaspora in a postmodern and post-colonial era. In this regard, Braidotti argues that “we are not all humans, or not human to the same degree, not if by ‘human’ one means to refer to the dominant vision of the Subject as white, male, heterosexual, urbanized, able-bodied, speaking a standard language and taking charge of the women and the children” (Braidotti 2014). According to Braidotti, many people may “belong to other, more marginalized categories or groups: non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, not urbanized,

not able-bodied, not speaking a standard language, not in charge of the women and the children”(ibid). In *Arabian Jaz*, many nomadic subjects are located in different zones of marginalization and exclusion in the American mainstream culture: Arab immigrants, hyphenated Americans, and women.

Abujaber’s debut novel narrates the story of the Ramouds, an Arab American family living in upstate New York. Matussem, the head of the family, migrated to the US from Jordan, and married an Irish American woman, Nora. The couple, apparently, represents the fusion of two distinct races: Arab and European. The two are united in the land of ethnic diversity, and have two girls: Jemorah and Melvina. Nora subsequently dies during a visit to Jordan as if the European White human being cannot live and survive in this space, this region and this part of the world where the culture, the religion and Nature are different.

Arabian Jaz portrays the life of an Arab immigrant family who live in a small town in upstate New York. The novel re-questions in many parts, the relevance of the American Dream, and the United States as the land of immigrants where humanity is celebrated. In Albert Memmi’s words, in the process of anti-colonial struggle, many people came to realize that the human being that western humanism spoke about was the White European human being (Memmi 2000, 227). In this respect, the

novel's title critiques the myth of the American Dream by merging two elements which refer to two main oppressed ethnic minorities of today's America: "jazz", redolent of black Americans, and "Arabian" signifying Arabs or Middle Eastern immigrants, i.e. racialized subjectivities (Braidotti 1994). The two may be considered as the most belittled groups in the US. Recent analyses of the novel's title have focused on jazz as an obsession of the main character Mutassem. One of these analyses is by Mazen Naous'. He asserts that the term "jazz" in the title of Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993) implies a process of improvisation and intertwining. As an essential characteristic of jazz music, improvisation manifests itself linguistically in *Arabian Jazz*, even as it intertwines with the novel's major themes.

Arabian Jazz deconstructs the truth of neo-liberal and neo-colonial America. The novel gives voice to individuals whose presence in the United States is practically rejected; it exposes the many truths of race-based exclusion which still persist in America, the so-called land of free Man. Arab Americans, native Americans, and Black Americans are dehumanized for being different from the dominant group, i.e. the White Man. Braidotti explains that the dominant subject is haunted by his structural 'others', because

...they are necessary to his self-representation, albeit by negation. They are the complement to that subject, who

constructs himself as much through what he excludes, as through what he includes in his sense of himself, his agency and his entitlements. The devalued ‘others’ constitute therefore the specular counterparts of the subject: different from him, they are valued less than him. (Braidotti 2014).

Deploying this understanding of how otherness is created, one can argue that the issue of Arabness and Muslimness in America is, at its core, an issue of difference. On the other hand, the novel also presents characters whose presence and upbringing in the United States liberate them from the trap of paralyzing traditions. I am referring here to second generation Arab Americans. Their otherness is doubled: they represent the other to mainstream Americans and the other to native Arabs. For instance, in a provocative statement, the young American—but Arab—Jemorah emphasizes that “The homing desire [...] is not the same as the desire for a homeland” (Abu-Jaber 1993, 197). This statement reflects the dilemma of being in-between two places where one is your home and the other, your diaspora. This insecure space is what creates the “inhuman” condition of diasporic individuals. To elaborate this idea, I will refer to the following quote by Edward Said. In his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Said confesses that exile is

...strangely compelling to think about, but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self

and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement" (Said 2000, 173).

Reading through this statement, I argue that exiled and/or diasporic subjects live a de-humanizing journey while oscillating between two memories, two homes, two histories, and therefore two selves. Being 'transplanted' in a new place and space where they are rejected makes them feel less human than other WASPs. This state of bewilderment has been further aggravated by the new American president Donald Trump's policy of exclusion².

In fact, it is this journey of displacement that de-humanizes the status of Arab immigrants in the US. It is, I argue, a nomadic journey. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of nomadism should be evoked to decipher the Ramouds' experience of a nomadic lifestyle that scattered the family across the world, and this is very similar to the current situation of thousands of Syrian refugees who left their homeland to roam around the world. "The nomad has a territory", explain Deleuze and Guattari :

[H]e follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But

the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*. (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987, 380)

In *Arabian Jazz*, the Ramoud family lives in Jordan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Moreover, the novel projects the particular zone where the Ramouds live as a peculiar space where: “No one ever escapes this place [...] You want to think twice about moving here. It’s like that show – The Twilight Zone?” (Abu-Jaber 1993, 90) Although Jemorah and Melvina are American born, they do not feel part of the White American mainstream, due to their father’s nationality, their appearance, and life experiences. They eventually conclude that they are “everything and nothing” (Abu-Jaber 1993, 330). From this perspective, it becomes clear that being recognized as both an Arab and an American seems to be extremely difficult.

Another crucial point, to be discussed subsequently, is the distinction that is made when referring to Arabs in America. We read in the novel: “Americans had the mon-

ey, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and understanding how life was meant to be lived” (Abu-Jaber 1993, 360). Allegedly, Arabs are seen as a different race, and thus, different human beings. In the novel, one can figure out that the difference is not only ethnicity-based, but culture-based as well. However, the untold truth about Arabs, as Rosina Hassoun (2011) explains, is that they are a macro-ethnic population with a common language, history, and cultural similarities. Arabs are a multiracial group with a variety of physical traits and a range of skin colors from light to dark. Therefore, it would be inappropriate and unfair to uncritically refer to all people coming from the MENA region as Arabs .

I contend that Abujaber’s *Arabian Jazz* portrays Arabs in America as nomadic subjects who are deemed to be belittled and dehumanized by the White mainstream culture based on a racial, religious and cultural discrimination. This contributes to a sense of dislocation and displacement even among second, third and fourth generations of Arab Americans. Consequently, a permanent feeling of marginalization hinders this community from fully assimilating into mainstream American culture. The next section will deal with another representation of the Arab diaspora through a study of *My Name is Salma*, a novel written by the British Jordanian female writer, Fadia Faqir. The point of divergence between Abujaber’s work and Faqir’s is that the latter novel rep-

resents another community of Arab immigrants who are also struggling to make a home for themselves in their adoptive country; Faqir's text, in other words, focuses on the British Arab minority group.

De-humanizing the Other: *My Name is Salma*

Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007) is set between the Middle East and Britain. It investigates the issue of immigrating to a Western country, i.e. Britain, not only as a new theme when it comes to the choice of the central character Salma, who is an unskilled Bedouin woman, but also in terms of raising questions about the future of Arabs who live in Britain. Salma is cut off from her country of origin and arrives in Britain for permanent stay; as such, the novel portrays conflicts of forced dislocation, integration, assimilation, racism and the settlement experience.

Faqir's novel examines issues related to women's invisibility in Arab countries and Arabs' invisibility in the diaspora. Nayera Alminiawi claims that *My Name is Salma* is a novel of a search for and an assertion of identity. She observes that the story is one of a physical and psychological journey from innocence to experience, from life to death, from an Arabic set up and language-world to an English environment, language and culture. (Alminiawi 2015, 61)

More importantly, the novel portrays the traumatic process of dehumanization that Salma, the protagonist, goes through, during a long journey of displacement and forced migration from Hima to Exeter. Faqir's text relates the story of Salma, a young woman from a traditional Bedouin society in the Middle East, who is impregnated before marriage. For this, she is sentenced to death by her society and family whose honor is tarnished. Salma thereafter embarks upon a long journey of displacement, dislocation and exile. She is put in prison for her own protection for several years; here she gives birth to a baby girl, Layla, whom she is not allowed to raise or see, until years later, when the girl is murdered by her brother, Mahmoud. Following her term in prison, Salma is compelled again, to relocate to another place, a new home, but this time for permanent stay—in a completely different country—England.

It is in her new homeland, Exeter, that Salma goes through the process of forming a new identity, with a new name—'Sally Asher'—even as she continues to be haunted by her past experiences in Hima. Having experienced a brutal process of acculturation, Salma's identity is fluid and unstable to the point of fragmentation, as she does not appear to have survived the move to England with an intact psyche. Relevant to this context, is Braidotti's (2011) conceptualization of the nomadic subject, as "a utopian figuration that is not about displacement but about a discursive freedom from dominant

narratives”(Maher 2009, 89). The nomadic subject is thus “a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity” (Braidotti 1994, 22). In this regard, I contend that Salma becomes a nomadic subject, following her exile in England. The fluidity of her identity, to draw from Braidotti’s theory, “expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity” (Braidotti 1994, 22). Her disrupted, disorganized memory is represented through a markedly fractured narration, oscillating between Salma’s past and Sally’s present. It is a spiral, rather than a linear, narrative. In the opening paragraph, the narrative begins in Hima (Faqr 2007, 7) while the following paragraphs are about life in Exeter. Salma’s depiction of her life, the reader notices, oscillates between her past in Hima and her present in Exeter.

Salma eventually starts putting together the pieces of her new life. She first finds a shelter, then a job; she starts doing an MA in English literature, and finds at last, a husband with whom she begins a new life with a new identity. However, being a dark-skinned Arab in the land of whiteness proves a major obstacle to her process of integration. What undermines Salma/Sally’s Britishness is her less/non-whiteness: “A few years ago, I had tasted my first fish and chips, but my mountainous Arab stomach could not digest the fat [...]Salma resisted, but Sally must adapt”(Faqr 2007, 9). The lines quot-

ed above, from the first chapter of the novel, sum up a long process of dislocation, acculturation and assimilation that the Bedouin Arab woman goes through. In the following passages, I will suggest how Salma as an Arab is invisibilized and dehumanized both in her native home and in the diaspora.

The displacement journey of many Arabs and Muslims to Western countries represents an experience is usually interwoven with Islamophobia, Arabophobia, racism and rejection; all of which lead to a constant feeling of marginalization, inferiority and alienation from the host country and its mainstream culture. Despite their will to assimilate and integrate into the host culture, immigrants, Arabs and Muslims particularly, become unfortunate victims of cultural humiliation, religious disdain, and social disintegration. In this connection, I claim that Faqir's *My Name is Salma* depicts a constant state of invisibility that both Arab immigrants in the West, and Arab women back home, confront. The novel portrays the difficulties and hardships faced by people living in the diaspora, and at the same time, voices the agonies of women living in conservative Bedouin communities. It deconstructs home and diaspora from a different angle to demonstrate the invisibility of Arab women in Bedouin homelands, on the one hand, and the marginalization of Arab immigrants in White mainstream societies, on the other.

In the opening pages of the first chapter, “Where the River Meets the Sea,” the reader encounters images and scenes portraying Salma/Sally’s awareness of being an alien both in Hima, her native village, and England, her foreign home – an awareness mingled with a bitter feeling of pain and chagrin: “If I did not know me I would have said that I was Salma, but my back was bent and my head was held low. I wrapped my trembling body with the warm towel and sniffed the air” (Faqr 2007, 6). Salma appears alien even to herself, and this confession made by the protagonist a long time after her stay in Exeter, is simply an inescapable result of being seen as strange and invisible, wherever she goes and whenever, she appears: by Elizabeth (the owner of the hostel where Salma lives in Exeter), by Mahmoud (her brother, who is an omnipresent threat to her life), by Parvin (her Pakistani friend who would later help Salma adapt to a diasporic English life), by her tribe back in Hima (where she is condemned to death and banished from her family’s memory), and by many other members of her ‘new’ country, England (where people see in her the exotic image of castaway Arabs/Muslims).

Another issue to be found in the novel is how discriminating race-based othering is produced by minorities themselves. Elsewhere in the story, we read:

Using his master keys, the porter opened the door and let in a short, thin, dark young woman ... when

she looked at me she could only see the slit of my eyes and a white veil so she turned to him. 'Where does she come from?' 'Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter,' he said and laughed. 'I am not going to share a room with an Arab,' she spat [...] I looked at her straight hair and long fringe and turned in my bed. The smell of hurt and broken promises filled the brightly lit room. (Faqr 2007, 15)

In this extract, there is a representation of an Arab woman facing strong antipathy from people around her because she comes from the Middle East. The reader also notices a scornful attitude shown by someone of her own gender. Here, Parvin displays her Arabophobia, like many other white people and non-Arabic immigrants in Britain. However, even Parvin belongs to the Orient based on Edward Said's conceptualization of the Orient (1978). According to Said, the West has created a dichotomy between the reality of the East and the romantic notion of the Orient. The Middle East and Asia are viewed with prejudice and racism. The West has created a culture, history, and future promise for the East. On this framework, rests not only the study of the Orient, but also the political imperialism of Europe in the East. Said discusses the dialectical relationship between the Occident and the Orient as a manifestation of "us versus them".

Thus, because of the British colonial experience in India, Pakistan and Indochina, the British Pakistani

Parvin, I argue, belongs to the same imaginative geography, perceived as the exotic Orient, as does Salma, the British Bedouin Arab woman. Such a Eurocentric view of people like Salma and Parvin is at the very center of a reductive Western master-narrative of the peripheral, non-White other. Parvin's words claim so too: "You know, Salma, we are like shingles. Invisible, snake-like. It slides around your body and suddenly erupts on your skin and then sting sting,' Parvin said and laughed" (Faqr 2007, 25). Parvin was, in this extract, referring to homeless immigrants or 'those who were either without a family or were trying to blot out their history' (Ibid), i.e. the dehumanized nomadic subjects coming from the undermined Orient which is, in Said's words, "an integral part of European material civilization and culture." (Said 1978, 22)

The Eurocentric master-discourse is noticeable as well, in Elizabeth's conversations with Salma/Sally. The scenes involving Salma and Elizabeth, alias Liz, the owner of the semi-detached house that Salma hires, project Liz's Eurocentric view of the Arab other, who is regarded as a "less white", non-native British subject, and legitimately dehumanized on that basis. In the beginning of the novel, Salma introduces Liz as her master; she says: "Liz, Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth I, Her Highness, my landlady was still asleep" (Faqr 2007, 10). This description encloses an orientalist view of Elizabeth who, to someone like Salma, represents European whiteness,

European people and the ex-colonizer. In another scene, Salma and Liz are watching television together:

‘Was that the shadow Chancellor?’ I asked Liz. ‘No, the Prime Minister. The Chancellor does not spit,’ she answered and looked at the television screen, not wanting to be interrupted. ‘Who are these puppets?’ I asked. ‘Foreigners! Aliens like you,’ she said and smiled. ‘Like me?’ I asked. ‘Yes, illegal immigrants,’ she said. ‘I no illegal,’ I said losing my English. ‘Yes, you are. You must be,’ she said. ‘Would you like a cuppa?’ I asked, imitating my friend Gwen and trying to change the subject. (Faqir 2007, 23-4)

This conversation is layered with multiple suggestions and nuances. First, we interpret Liz’s answers as a legitimized belittlement and vilification of the Arab Other, who is perceived as less human. In addition, the passage reflects Salma’s sense of inferiority. Salma feels unfairly undermined despite her British citizenship; yet she tries hard to imitate other British natives. As Bhabha explains, mimicry is the act of repeating rather than re-presenting, and in that very act of repetition, originality is lost, and centrality de-centred (Bhabha 1994, 85-92). Thus, by imitating Gwen’s English, Salma loses her “original” Bedouin self, but remains “less British” at the same time, because her very gesture of imitating Gwen entails an awareness that she is not fully British. Hence, Salma is stuck in the perennial limbo of trying to become Sally.

In another scene, the reader is shocked by Salma's reaction when Elizabeth injures her arm. Drunk, Liz injured Salma's forearm, while she was trying to take a whip out of Liz's hand. Liz was hitting bottles with the whip, imagining she was talking to some Indian upahs and wallahs (maids): "Slaves must never breathe English air," Liz says, while Salma is waiting for a taxi to take her to the hospital (Faqr 2007, 185). Unexpectedly, Salma lies to the doctor and tells him that she cut her hand while chopping salad. Salma's reaction could be read from different perspectives. It could be seen as an act of empathy with Liz's miserable circumstances after the latter is stripped of her prestigious status. However, it may also be viewed as an act of Salma's self-imposed subordination, owing to what she perceives as her inferior status-quo and "given" subalternity in a White Western world. Significant in this regard, are Gramsci (1947) and Spivak's (1988) conceptualizations of subalternity as subordination. In fact, Spivak borrowed the term 'subaltern' from Gramsci, to refer to the unrepresented group of people in the society. For Spivak, the term 'subaltern' encompasses the exact picture of the lower class and discriminated people. Edward Said, in the same vein, argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), that the representation of the subaltern is meant to fulfill the ideological function of keeping the "subordinate subordinate, [and] the inferior inferior" (Said 1993, 80).

My Name is Salma, like many other novels by Anglo-phone Arab writers, unveils bitter truths about being an

Arab in a foreign country where this misrepresented and misrecognized ethnic group is vilified and denigrated, based on a Eurocentric perception of the 'oriental' Arab world, which, I contend, is different from the West, but not necessarily inferior. In conclusion, I will emphasize how the dehumanization of the Arab community has worsened relationships between Arabs, Muslims and the West.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to bring to light how Arabs are vilified and dehumanized, based on an alleged ethnic and religious inferiority, which, to extrapolate a conceptual term from Foucault (1966), is an outcome of an unjust process of "exteriorization". Arab and/or Muslim immigrants, in most Western countries are excluded, and therefore exteriorized, from the white Eurocentric homogeneity, due to their skin color, religion(s) and cultural background(s). According to Foucault, "the historical description of things said is shot through with the opposition of interior and exterior; and wholly directed by a desire to move from the exterior—which may be no more than contingency or mere material necessity, a visible body or uncertain translation—towards the essential nucleus of interiority" (Foucault 1966, 120-121). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that as much as the West itself, the "Orient" is an idea that "has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (Said 1978, 5). Arabs and/or Muslims are ex-

cluded based on a falsified representation propagated by the mainstream media in most Western countries where so-called “oriental” subjects, including Arabs, Muslims and Asians, are considered a threat to humanity. The ongoing denigration of Arabs, who include both Muslims and non-Muslims, has aggravated the plight of Arab immigrants in Europe and the United States. Trump’s travel ban, his immigration policy and European far-right anti-immigrant policies have made it increasingly difficult for immigrants, refugees and exiles to integrate into the mainstream culture. Thus, many Anglophone Arab writers, particularly American Arabs and British Arabs, tend to raise questions about being hyphenated and nomadic subjects who are stuck between two opposing spaces: home and diaspora, being Arabs and being American/British. These writers also evoke the dilemma of the integration of Arab immigrants into mainstream Western cultures when the latter exclude them from their cultural and social life. Faqir and Abujaber, among others, have successfully voiced the agonies of excluded and displaced Arabs in the diaspora. The selected novels offer a glimpse of how Arabs, refugees and ethnic/religious minorities are looked upon by many Western/Euro-centrists. From this perspective, and with the unprecedented escalation of refugee crises in Europe and across the globe, greater attention and consideration should be given to the consequences, aftermaths and estimated solutions for a successful integration of these new comers, not only by governments and states, but also and more importantly, by the peoples of the host countries.

Notes

¹ The term ‘glocalization’ expresses the ways in which globalization dynamics are always reinterpreted locally, leading to an interpenetration of the local and global scales that creates context-dependent outcomes. Some authors go so far as to contend that glocalisation is the way in which globalisation really operates (Robertson, 1992).

² I am referring here to the travel ban executive order signed by Trump on 6th March 2017 to ban immigration from six Muslim-majority countries: Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Syria and Libya.

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*Review of Australia's New
Migrants. International Stu-
dents' History of Affective
Encounters with the Border
by Maria Elena Indelicato. Lon-
don and New York: Routledge,
2018.*

Ivana Prazic

As noted in the introduction to Maria Elena Indelicato's book, which is based on her doctoral dissertation earned in the field of gender and cultural studies, this work was to a large extent informed by the author's personal experience as an international student in Australia. Motivation to turn her research focus to the problematisation of international students in Australia was additionally boosted by an event which, for a while, kept Australia's educational industry, as well as the country's race relations, in the focus of international attention. The event in question refers to a series of violent attacks in Melbourne against Indian international students, which

were followed by their public protests in 2009 and 2010 (Chapter 3 and 4). Whereas the students claimed that the attacks were racially motivated, governmental response signified them as opportunistic instances of urban violence. Indian media, in turn, identified racism as the primary motivation behind the attacks. To a great extent, then, Indelicato's research presented in this book is an attempt to understand which discourses were historically mobilised to maintain the long-standing racism surfacing behind current Australia's politics and policies towards international students. As the book reveals, Indelicato's research enabled her to identify discursive continuities, and rhetorical rearticulations, linking the colonial period with post-Second World era in Australia. In placing colonialism and its (dis)continuity at the heart of her affective discussion of racism, Indelicato has made an important contribution to the body of critical postcolonial studies.

Indelicato's argument is developed through five main chapters, each one of which offers a rounded debate of the themes around which she organised her research into historical, disciplinary, methodological and analytical (dis)connections between migration and international education in the geopolitics of postcolonial racism. All chapters follow their internal debating logics and elaborate on separate aspects of the main argument, each displaying an independent reading unit. This allows Indelicato to afford not only a sense of the comprehensive

flow of her argument, but also reach stylistic mastery in presenting her argument gradually. Starting from developing a theoretical framework, literature review and meticulous archival research discussed in chapters 1 and 2—but also interspersed through other chapters—the author shifts to discourse analysis of the paradigmatic case studies in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Methodological versatility displayed throughout her book bestows her writing with an almost fiction-like excitement.

Indelicato approaches the study of international students in Australia as subjects of both educational and migration policies, who have traditionally been depicted as “emotionally distressed subjects” (2). Hers is a Foucauldian quest of the historical ways in which the feelings of international students were deployed as a means to construe them as simultaneously belonging to sovereign post-colonies while being treated as prospective national subjects, i.e. migrants, within Australia as their educational host.

On the one hand, this methodology enables the author to look across disciplinary field in which international students and their histories within societies informing former imperial, settler nation as Australia, have traditionally been problematised. For instance, in Chapter 1, she identifies the concept of “culture contact” as crucial for the hegemonic hermeneutics of difference arising from the presence of overseas students in Australia.

This concept allows her to include anthropology as an important field behind the historicised representation of international students as “emotionally distressed subjects” which has characterised the discourses on overseas students in Australia since the end of the Second World War. Going a step further, in a genealogical quest behind the stereotypical label of “Asian student” as objects of national threat, she makes a discursive connection between the overseas study scheme known as the Colombo Plan (1951), mid-19th- and early 20th-century Australian migration policies for the Chinese, “white Australia” migration policy abolished in 1974, and neo-liberal transformation of education into a major export industry since 1980s. In tracing down the history of the representation of international students as “emotionally distressed subjects,” Indelicato has uncovered a connection with similarly-labeled migrants in the early 20th-century United States, then traditionally studied within the field of medical health science.

On the other hand, Indelicato’s approach to the emotional renditions of international students in Australia in her search for the socio-political effects of such rendition firmly grounds her work in the body of critical feminist study of affect. For instance, in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 she analyses the socio-political role which emotions related to international students play in (both local and Indian) discourses related to 2008-2009 attacks against Indian international students in Australia. As noted ear-

lier, while the Indian international students protested against what they saw as racially structured violence, the authorities dismissed those claims as accusation of racism insisting the attacks were examples of urban violence. In Chapter 4 the author “examines the response of the state and federal representatives to the accusation of racism to show how the solution envisioned to protect international students’ safety functioned as a new pedagogy of racial concealment and mobility constriction” (92). When approached as urban crime, “the violence that Indian students suffered could be generalised as a risk threatening the whole of the urban population of Australia, making racism irrelevant as a result” (98). In 2010 Victoria Police inaugurated a social media campaign with the aim of educating international students on matters related to their personal safety, titled *Are You Feeling Lucky? Think Before You Travel* (110-121). Indelicato’s analysis of the campaign reveals that its message is articulated in line with what she termed as “the new pedagogy of racial concealment”. This pedagogy relies on the historicised affective representation of international students as “passive” and “easily impressionable”—in other words, feminised—subjects, in contrast to “Australian white-male subjectivity [...] established as the site of both bodily and intellectual superiority thanks to the self-assigned capacities to be active instead of passive, to impress upon others instead of being impressed” (120).

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of what is termed as Australia’s “interpretive denial” in relation to the signifi-

cation of attacks as racist in nature. While the Indian media insisted that the attacks were racist, Australian media accused their Indian counterparts as acting out of hysteria. Relying on the feminist scholarship on anger as emotional response to racism, Indelicato shows that “the Australian authorities’ and media’s interpretation of their Indian counterparts’ expressions of anger as hysteria worked as a technology of affective dismissal that aimed to protect Australia’s moral authority in the Asia-Pacific area more broadly” (127) against the perceived “erosion” of the country’s “geo-political influence to the emergence of economic powers such as India” (149).

In theoretical terms, this book makes a valuable contribution to the feminist theory of affect and its deployment within critical race studies with a confident conceptualisation of racism through politicised deployment of emotions. Emotions do the labour of race in allowing the international students to be construed as inherently different and inferior to domestic students in Australia. In other words, affective discourses about international students on studies in Australia have racist effect despite the lack of the deployment of the concept of race in such discourses. In methodological terms, Indelicato’s meticulous historical and archival exploration sheds new light on the role of educational policies in the shaping of the Asia Pacific region in postcolonial period. As such, it will be of much interest to scholars of international

relations and area studies, as well as historians of Asia (Pacific) in general.

Although Indelicato's critique of displacement of race from the heuristics of international education could be taken to refer to all, or most, liberal democracies and former imperial powers, her study is contextualised within the country where she earned her Ph.D. as the basis of her book, i.e. Australia. With its critique of Australia's multiculturalism as the alleged solution to the problem of managing national diversity, this book will also interest all scholars who work in the field of critical political philosophy, as well as those with the expertise in critical race and ethnic studies.

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