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EDITORS' NOTE

Pondering on Justice can often evoke moods that are simultaneously farcical, tragic or absurd. Various post-colonial countries experience this crisis of justice with varying degrees of intensity but most remain acutely aware of its often chimerical status that transforms its apparent impartial blindness into wilful prejudice and consequent deprivation. Quite naturally therefore, the idea of justice has been haunting literary authors, theorists, and readers in multiple ways: economic, affective, gendered, psychological, material, ecological and so on. However, the idea of justice, global, social or personal, must necessarily rely on ethics. Yet, in an era of post-truth, where things that are supposed to be abhorrent and hateful are often becoming a part of the socio-political norm, where the typical postmodern "waning of affect", highlighted by Fredric Jameson often makes people insensitive to gross miscarriages of basic human rights, how does one speak cogently of justice?

The articles in this volume seek answers to such troubling questions from divergent perspectives. The issue

opens with Mursed Alam and Anindya Purakayastha's featured article on the plight of the Rohingyas which has certainly failed to engage popular empathy in India. This is followed by three successive articles, by Amanda Gonzalez Izquierdo, Suzanne LaLonde and Zachary Vincent Bordas which focus on the issue of justice from epistemic, psychoanalytic, ecological and ethnic perspectives by foregrounding a variety of contemporary literary texts and theoretical debates. Of course, the idea of justice must grapple with various forms of material deprivations dependent on such entrenched determinants as caste and class. as well The two subsequent articles on dalit female narratives and the representational matrix surrounding filipino domestic workers in Singaore, one by Bhushan Kumar and Anurag Sharma and the other by Paul Woods, foreground just such oppressions and the ways in which the subalternised individuals respond to their constricting circumstances.

The next set of articles, while remaining concerned with ethics and justice, are more general in nature and take us to various corners of the realm of postcolonial studies. While S. Basheer and S. A. Saeed delve into Arab petrofiction, Praveen Sewgobind explores the politics of memorialisation in relation to slavery and forced migration of indentured Indian labourers to the former Dutch colony of Suriname. The next article by Kavita Malstead deals with another kind of diasporic experience by analysing the short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri.

This is followed by Shivaji Mridha's analysis of *Weep Not, Child* in relation to the evolving field of postcolonial trauma studies which offers a fresh perspective on a canonical text. The section ends with yet another critical exploration based on the intersection of ecocritcism and postcolonial studies by Sagnik Yadaw and Rupsha Roy Chowdhury. The concluding piece, quite aptly in view of the focus on justice, is a review of Ajay Gudavarthy's *India after Modi* by Saswat Samai Das and Deepak Mathew.

As always, the attempt has been to ensure that scholars and academics are able to explore new vistas of knowledge in relation to postcolonial studies, through the platform offered by this journal, which will allow them to make better sense of the contemporary world through a whole host of aesthetic, affective and ethical concerns and perspectives, generated by the contributors, the editorial team and the readers. The success of the attempt of course depends on the abiding support of our many well-wishers scattered around the world. It is your engagement with *Postcolonial Interventions* that makes this labour of love worthwhile.

Keep writing, keep reading, keep sharing! May all those voices which lie neglected in silence find life through you and us. May their hidden light shine through us and help us resist the barbarians at our gates.

Globalectics of the Border-Subaltern: Postcolonial Justice in a Time of Crisis Diaspora

Mursed Alam and Anindya S Purakayastha

The postcolonial state which was endowed with lots of responsibilities to ensure the smooth transition from the repressive regimes of coloniality to the liberated beginning of postcoloniality, has failed in multiple ways in executing its role of empowering the subjugated subjects of the newly independent citizenry. The much despised colonial legacy of repression, authoritarianism, high-

handedness and autocratic brutalities continued in many ways in the postcolonial phase and multiple new regimes of powers got deepened through the power dynamics of electoral battles in postcolonial states. The preexisting power structures of class, caste, gender and religion were never allowed to be completely subverted by the postcolonial state as it thrived on electoral manipulation of these lines of division and hierarchies. This has led to myriad mutinies in independent India and in other South Asian and African postcolonial nations which have witnessed massive use of violence both as a means of resistance and as methods of governmental control, resulting in severe forms of traumas and injuries to the postcolonial citizen. This paper would look into all these issues to evaluate the success and failures of the postcolonial state and in doing that it would map areas of discontents, bruises and agonies so that questions of state and citizenship rights can be reframed in the current context. Its primary focus and frame of reference will be on the current Rohingya refugee crisis and the rise of xenophobia in South Asian countries which were former colonies of British Empire – something that exposes the failures of the postcolonial state in its deliverance of justice to its citizens. This crisis of citizen predicament arising out of border deepening and ethnicization of postcolonial democracies has resulted in, we would argue, a new brand of crisis diaspora, something new – a group of citizens turned non-citizens by the postcolonial state which was supposed to be their protector.

This has erased the distinction between colonial tyranny and postcolonial repression, giving birth to a 'globalectic' of subalternity which is a consequence of war, postcolonial ultra-nationalism, minority witch-hunting, etc.

The resurgence of xenophobic nationalism and majoritarian identity politics within postcolonial countries have thrown up many questions about postcolonial state, democratic politics and citizenship rights. The ultra-nationalist proclivities push a regime to flout democratic responsibilities resulting in the otherisation and alienation of a large number of minorities who are being forced to live a life of violent torture, insecurity and statelessness. This paper proposes to investigate how postcolonial countries like Mayanmar as well as India are fast becoming ethnic democracies that do not shy away from resorting to genocide to consolidate majoritarian interests. Aung San Suu Kyi, herself a postcolonial leader, looks like a neo-colonial matriarch now through her silence on the Rohingya Muslims question and her inaction or collusion with the Myanmar military junta legitimises indigenous state brutalities by pushing the Rohingya Muslims into a no-where-citizen condition. In India, too, the majoritarian agenda pursued by the current political dispensation has resulted in systematic attack on the minorities and dalits in the forms of lynchings, otherisation and cultural ghettoization etc. This crisis of postcolonial precarity demands a rethinking of the postcolonial theoretical optics. The present

excursus proposes to investigate how the Rohingya mass murder and their exodus and the ethno-nationalistic tendencies in postcolonial countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka and India have thrown up new questions on twenty-first century democratic states or on postcolonial nation, and how postcolonialism needs to re-investigate the question of nation state and justice today.

The recent heart wrenching images of the capsizing crescent-shaped boats in the Naf river across the Bangladesh-Myanmar border resulting in many refugee deaths during the perilous journeys of the persecuted Rohingya minorities in Myanmar have thrown up many questions about postcolonial politics and the current positional and definitional categories of the subaltern. In this paper, we propose to map these emerging domains of precarities and subalternities in order to re-theorise the postcolonial subaltern question today. The *Subaltern Studies* project replaced elitist historiography with subaltern historiography but the categorical baggage of the project are looking inadequate in the wake of the recent crisis of the displaced, the migrants, and the nowhere people. Instead of focussing merely on the elite/subaltern divide, can we retheorize the subaltern from the vantage point of the crisis diaspora and the precarious bare life of the contemporary *Homo Sacers* – the immigrants, the minorities, xenophobia victims, the war subalterns, etc? We argue for renewing the category of the subaltern through a critique of ethno-regionalism or identity-centric border

vigilantism so that we can focus on trans-borderal/global solidarities rather than foregrounding the originary category of the postcolonial nation. Borrowing foundational ideas from the *Subaltern Studies Collective* and Hanna Arendt's theorisations on totalitarianism, violence and the human condition, we plan to come up with fresh optics of 'border thinking' that will have cross-borderal ramifications as subalternity in the age of Trump and global refugee exodus has assumed universal contours.

In that way, this paper calls for a new theoretical plexus for postcolonial studies in the wake of emergency/crisis diasporas. The war-torn Middle East and the militarised Myanmar region have generated the recent refugee exodus across Europe and South Asia, resulting in, what we would call, war-subalterns and border weakening and redefining in the process issues of citizenship, insiders/outsiders, cultural singularities and the political economy of mass slaughter. Drawing on the theoretical interventions of Subaltern Studies, this paper seeks to make a case for Subaltern Cultural Studies that takes into account the marginalised agonies and voices of the war-subalterns that challenge our conventional notion of identity – both communal and national. The image of the dead body of Ailan Kurdi, the Syrian refugee boy floating on the shore of Europe gained an immediate agency that changed the migrant/refugee debate that led Germany and other European countries to open their borders. This macabre spectacle of death of many refugees, encountered while frantically undertaking a perilous boat journey in

the quest for safer abodes, problematises existing ideas of citizenship, state control, bordering, culture and rootedness. What would be the contour of postcolonial studies in the aftermath of such recent forms of neo-precarity? This desperate trans-borderal outflux of refugees also demands a re-invigoration of the concepts of hospitality, gift and state responsibility. Postcolonial studies, committed to envoicing the peripheral since its inception needs to resuscitate this ethico-political agenda of justice to foreground a trans-borderal globalectics of cultural and political ethics that transcend prevalent dialectics of the insider and the afflicted other. In what follows we will make an in depth study of the Rohingya crisis as an emerging new site of postcolonial precarity that throws open issues of state, justice and citizenship rights. In doing that we will initially historicise the Rohingyas, their locatedness in Myanmar, their citizenship crisis and their forceful and brutal eviction leading to their exodus to neighbouring Bangladesh and India. The Rohingya issue, to our mind has foregrounded a scenario of recolonization and terrible postcolonial injustice as the postcolonial state in this case has emerged as the neo-tyrant, calibinizing its own citizens and thereby scripting a bloody narrative of violence and rampant injustice in the name of ethnic nationalism.

The Rohingya as the Postcolonial Precariat

In South Asian countries violence has different trajectories and ontological enumerations taking divergent

forms ranging from ethno-political, structural, religio-cultural, caste, gender to epistemic templates. The rise of ethno-democracy and majoritarianism coupled with post-9/11 securitization and Islamophobia have led to violence on the *otherised* marginalities and 'foreign bodies' and new border-regimes with changing calculus of techno-political control have taken shape. In this paper we attempt to understand the violence perpetrated on the Rohingyas in Myanmar and their travails in Bangladesh and India where they seek refuge. The Rohingya are the most persecuted ethnic minority in the world and according to the UN the recent persecution of the Rohingya by the Buddhist Myanmar military amounts to ethnic cleansing and genocide. The development of Myanmar as an 'ethnocratic state' has unleashed a cycle of state violence on the Rohingya by often manipulating legal instruments and in cahoots with non-state religious actors. Characterised as 'Asia's New Boat People', the Rohingyas have become 'stateless in a world of nation-states'. We take stock of their postcolonial predicament and their consequent precarious and uncertain life in order to analyse its implications for postcolonial theory today. This paper, thus, would first analyse the becoming of the Rohingya as stateless *Homo Sacer* in Myanmar and the subsequent state-military violence on them. After doing that the paper would engage with their negotiation on refuge in Bangladesh and India only to highlight that their attempt to escape violence and statelessness is never fulfilled. Finally the paper, after engag-

ing with the recent debates on postcolonial subalternisation, would make a theoretical claim that a 'new project' on subalternity in South Asia can emerge from the vantage point of the forced refugees and stateless people. Although there is a lack of consensus among scholars, as *The Oxford Handbook of Refugees and Forced Migration* (2016) shows, about the definition of who is a refuge and how to define and understand forced migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2017 estimated the number of forcibly displaced population worldwide to be around 65.3 million among whom 21.3 million are living as refugees in the developing countries (Farzana 2017, 1). Thus, forced displacement and statelessness has become critical issue in the current historical conjuncture. Statelessness is a legal condition in which a person is denied nationality or citizenship of any country. The Article 1 of the 1954 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons defines a stateless person as someone 'who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law'. Although this legal definition of statelessness called *de jure* stateless covers those who are not given citizenship automatically at their birth or fails to get it through the legal provisions of a state, there is the category of *de facto* stateless or stateless persons in practice – those who are not formally denied or deprived nationality, but because of lack of proper document, or despite documents, are denied access to various human rights that a citizen normally enjoys. (qtd. in Basu Ray

Chaudhury and Samaddar ed. 2018, 109) The Rohing-ya Muslim community fleeing the ethnic and religious persecution in Myanmar and their travails in the countries of refuge make them the nowhere-nation precariat.

India, Bangladesh and Myanmar have a shared colonial history and before the borders of modern nations-states separated them they shared the border under the colonial rule. These three countries along with the South-East Asian countries like Malaysia and Thailand together comprise a geography of violence in terms of the Rohingya Muslims. Dubbed as 'Asia's New Boat People', reminiscing the Vietnamese Boat People, their stateless precarious condition is often compared with that of the Palestinians under occupied territory. Following C Ryan's categorization of the Palestinians in the occupied territory, the stateless non-citizens, as Madhura Chakrabarty points out, can be termed as 'subjected non-subjects'- without rights, but not without the state's disciplinary interventions and discrimination. (Basu Ray Chaudhury and Samaddar ed. 2018, 109) For an analysis of the precarious condition of the Rohingya in South Asia we have to understand the context and the history of the production of statelessness of the Rohingyas in Myanmar which amounted to virtual displacement of all rights of the Rohingyas in their place of origin and in subsequent countries of refuge. Let us first discuss the history of the Rohingya in postcolonial Myanmar and their legal dismemberment that led to the cycle of violence and persecution of them.

Postcolonial Ethno-nationalism, Identity Violence and the Rohingya as Outsider

The Rohingyas are the ethnic, religious and linguistic minority in the Buddhist-majority Myanmar as well as in their province Rakhine (formerly known as Arakan). And the statelessness of the Rohingya in Myanmar has a historical trajectory. At the heart of the persecution and discrimination of the Rohingyas, as Azeez Ibrahim points out, is 'the shifting legal definition of the Burmese citizenship'. After the independence of Mayanmar from the British colonial rule, the Rohingyas in the newly established nation-state of Myanmar were placed in a special category compared with other ethnicities. Although the democratic government of Prime Minister U Nu in the 1950s accepted that the Rohinyas were an indigenous ethnic group, the 1947 Constitution did not grant them full citizenship. Why were the Rohingyas singled out? The 1947 revolt of the Rohingyas for independence and the supposed 1948 petition by the Rohingya representatives to the government of Mayanmar for inclusion of Rakhine/ Arakan to East Pakistan might have created suspicion about the loyalty of the Rohingyas to the state of Myanmar. However, their revolt compared to the Shan and Karen ethnic groups were minor. There was anti-Muslim sentiment arising from the British having sometimes preferred the Muslims and facilitating immigration from India which deprived the Burmese of employment during colonial rule.

But other Muslim minorities, both in Rakhine and other parts of Myanmar, were given full citizenship (Ibrahim 2016, n.p.). Perhaps the issue of migration from India was a vexed one. However, the Rohingyas were more or less viewed as one of the ethnic groups of the multi-ethnic fabric of Myanmar and it was expected that their legal citizenship status would be solved in near future. As per the Article 11 (iv) of the Constitution, the Rohingyas were given National Registration Certificate (NRC) with full legal and voting rights. They were told that they need not to apply for citizenship certificate as they were 'one of the indigenous races of the union of Burma'. During the period of 1948-1961, some (between four and six) Rohingyas served as members of the parliament and even after the military coup they remained in the parliament as supporters of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. The main target of discrimination at this period were those who were viewed as Indian migrants and were treated as foreigners. However, as Azeez Ibrahim writes, 'this distinction between the labour migrants and the Rohingyas was slowly eroded after the military took over in 1962' (Ibrahim 2016, n.p.).

Although military rule initially did not directly attack the Rohingyas and some Rohingyas continued to sit in the parliament supporting the military's *Burmese Road to Socialism* project up to 1965, the situation changed steadily after that and the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act imposed ethnicity based identity cards or the National

Registration Cards with the Rohinyas only given Foreign Registration Certificates (non-national cards). This move of the military regime is viewed as a diversionary tactics from the failure of the Burmese Road to Socialism project and the economic crisis. Thus, the Rohingyas became a soft target for diverting people from pressing economic hardships- a pattern later repeated frequently. The Article 145 of the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma defined citizenship as- 'All persons born of parents both of whom are nationals of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma are citizens of the Union' (quoted in Ibrahim 2016, n.p.). As Rohingyas were not treated as formal citizens in 1947, they could not now be citizens of the state. Their NRC of 1947 was also replaced with Foreign Registration Certificate.

The next crucial legal step was the 1982 Burmese Citizenship Law in which different categories of citizenship were assigned to ethnic groups on the basis of their residence in Burma since 1823 prior to the British takeover. This is a crucial step in producing the Rohingyas as strangers in their own country as citizenship was granted to those ethnic groups who were thought to have lived in Burma before the British annexation and a lot of justification of the denial of citizenship rights to the Rohingyas are derived from the perception that the Rohingyas are actually the Bengalis who are brought by the British as labourers and the ethnic identity of the Rohingyas are actually made up by the Rohinyas to get citizenship. Although the Muslims in Arakan lived since

beginning of the MraukU dynasty (1430-1785), if not before, it is also alleged that the so called the Rohingyas did not live the Arakan prior to British rule. Thus, under the 1982 legislation the Rohingyas were denied citizenship based on the ethnic classification of 1947 as the Rohingyas were not designated as belonging to the core ethnic group of the new state. This was aggravated by regular passing of Martial Law legislation. However, the ambiguity surrounding the whole process allowed the Rohingyas to participate in the 1990 election. The denial of citizenship meant restriction on movement, lack of access to education, loss of land and increase of violence which led to rise of refugees fleeing to Bangladesh. The 1977 Nagamin Movement saw a sudden rise of violence against the Rohingyas by the Buddhist community and the army which led to over 200000 refugees fleeing to Bangldesh in 1978.

In the aftermath of the 1988 political revolt in which the Buddhist monks supported the agitating students and played active role, the electoral defeat of the military in the 1990 election and the annulment of the election result by the military, there is an increase in the persecution and violence against the Rohingyas. The 1991-92 witnessed 2,50000 Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh against the backdrop of forced labour, beating, rape, land confiscation and creation of non-Rohingya settlement on the land taken from Rohingyas and often built by forced labour of the Rohingyas. Bangladesh, too, forcibly returned the Rohingyas in violation of the UN declara-

tions on universal human rights and the rights of the refugees. Those who returned found their land taken by the military for building army camps or settlement of non-Rohingyas which renewed tension and subsequent repression and migration to Bangladesh. Those who fled to Malaysia remained stateless refugees as Malaysia would not return them or give them proper refugee status. The refugees are often sold in slavery in the lucrative fishing industry of Thailand by the human traffickers which meant more harassment or extortion of the Rohingyas fleeing persecution, and frequent death in camps run by the human traffickers. Thus, there is a 'racial aspect to the overall pattern of legal discrimination against the Rohingyas' (Ibrahim 2016, n.p.).

The return to democracy (2008-2015) has, instead of solving the problem, worsened the crisis for the Rohingyas. After the Saffron Revolution in which the Buddhist monks participated, there was a close alliance between the National League for Democracy (henceforth NLD) and the Buddhist organisations. As NLD is too much focussed on the personality of Suu Kyi, for mass base it has to depend on the Buddhist monks. Thus, well organised Buddhist groups many of whom demand expulsion of the Rohingyas exert considerable influence over NLD's practical politics. Thus, the NLD-Buddhist alliance has been problematic for the minorities like the Rohingyas as the ideological leaders of persecution of the Rohingyas came from the Buddhist monks who demanded the

tying up of citizenship with Buddhism. Thus, attack on the Rohingyas, whether by the military or the Buddhist groups became a public way of showing their commitment to Buddhism. And the most depressing thing about the attacks on the Rohingyas is the indecipherable silence of the leader of NLD. The Buddhist groups like the 969 Movement which wants a religiously pure state provides ideological diatribe against the Rohingya Muslims and are intent to prevent Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) or NLD to turn towards more humane policies. Under this extremist group and pressure from their leaders, especially by U Wirathu, Rohingya Muslim shops are boycotted, inter-faith marriage banned, forced child control measures are implemented and Rohingyas in the name of cow protection are targeted.

The 2012 massacre of Rohingyas which started with the rape and murder of a Rakhine woman by three Muslims quickly took on a widespread campaign against the Rohingyas community which can be termed as ethnic cleansing. NLD is in alliance with the regional ethnic Rakhine parties like Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) and Arakan National Party (ANP) in Rakhine which want to expel the Rohingyas. The campaign was widespread, often organised by social media, which projected the Rohingyas as a moral threat and there was widespread violence against the Rohingyas in which often the security forces took part and as a result the Rohingyas were relocated in internal refugee camps. This

isolated the Rohingyas economically and socially which in turn leads to breakdown of empathy and increase in ignorance about one another fuelling a cycle of distrust. Many Rakhine political leaders aimed at making refugee camps as permanent which denies the Rohingyas the means of earning a living except through precarious work. There is also attack on the locals if they help or associate with the Rohingyas. The 2014 Census did not allow the Rohinyas to be enrolled if they did not identify themselves as 'Bengalese' resulting in the loss of any identity cards which again is used for justification of throwing the Rohingyas in camps. Thus, persecution and exclusion of the Rohingyas have been normalised which led to their desperate journeys in search of shelter or means of living either in Bangladesh or other countries. Many have fallen prey to the human traffickers and work as slaves in Thailand. Some estimates suggest that about 500000 slaves work in Thailand. These modern day slaves are so cheap that they are almost expendable. The recent uncovering of mass graves point out their captivity in camps in Thailand –Malaysia borders. The boat people are thus emerging as the no-where-nation precariat. The conditions in the internal refugee camps in Myanmar which is forcing the Rohingyas to migrate for livelihood thus remind us of concentration camps and a genocide by attrition is taking place. In the next segment I would be focussing on the precarious life of the Rohingya in Bangladesh caught in between hospitality and control, between invitation and violent rejection.

Postcolonial Ouster and Injustice: Rohingya in the Margin

For the overwhelming majority of the Rohingyas fleeing religious persecution and ethnic violence in Myanmar, Bangladesh is their first destination. Located across the River Naf, Bangladesh seems to be preferred for easy accessibility and the cultural, linguistic and religious affinities between the Rohingyas and the Chittagonian Muslim Bengalis. The latest exodus of the stateless Rohingya to Bangladesh started on 25 August 2017 when the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on the Rohingya following an attack by a group of armed Rohingya called Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on the police and military posts killing 12 officers. The Myanmar Government declared ARSA as a terrorist group and in the crackdown that followed at least seven thousand Rohingya were killed between August 25 and September 24, 2017. (Council of Foreign Relations, 2018) According to UNHCR this has resulted in more than 723,000 Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh most of whom arrived in Bangladesh in the first quarter of the crisis. An estimated 12,000 reached Bangladesh during the first half of 2018. (UNHCR) With the existing 300,000 Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh because of ethnic violence in the last three decades the total number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh is now more than 1 million. (The Washington Post, 2017) The vast majority of the

Rohingya seeking refuge in Bangladesh during the influx are children with more than 40 percent under the age of 12. The Rohingya in Bangladesh sought shelter in the two refugee camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara in the Cox's Bazar district. With the new spontaneous settlements Kutupalong has become the largest refugee settlement in the world with more than 600,000 people living in an area of just 13 square kilometres with consequences for infrastructural and other basic services.

Bangladesh has not acceded to the 1954 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or its 1967 Protocol and in the absence of a legal and administrative framework for refugees the fate of the Rohingya in Bangladesh depends on the changing ideology and electoral calculus of the political regimes. They are not recognised as refugees but rather as 'Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals' (FDMN) denying them the legal status of a refuge and the concomitant rights. And thus despite the mentioned cultural, linguistic and religious similarities between the Rohingyas and the Chittagongian Bangladeshis and despite the historical fact that Arakan and Chittagong region were once under one administrative unit, the Bangladesh Government views them not as Bengalis but as temporary asylum-seekers from Myanmar who must return to Myanmar. The Bangladesh Government's views, as Farzana points out, can be summarised in tree points-first, the Rohingyas flee the repressive policies of the

Myanmar authorities in Arakan, second, that they are economic migrants and third, that there is a tendency in the Rohingyas to go abroad using Bangladesh as their transit route (Farzana 2017, 64-65). Thus, the Bangladesh Government views the Rohingya issue as external and hold that the refugees must be repatriated.

After the first refugee exodus in 1977 Bangladesh Government treated the Rohingyas sympathetically and set up camps along the border of River Naf to the side of Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway. As the Bangladeshis were treated hospitably by its neighbours during its independence struggle (1971), the newly established state of Bangladesh took the opportunity to show its hospitality to the Rohingya refugees who were fleeing persecution like the Bangladeshis few years back. However, the Bangladesh Government viewed it as a temporary measure as the refugees have to return to Myanmar soon. The Bangladesh Government started diplomatic attempts with Myanmar and consequently an agreement was signed in July, 1978. The bi-lateral agreement hold that Myanmar would repatriate the 'lawful residents of Burma' having NRC and family group photo. This, however, was indicative of the Myanmar Government's reluctance to repatriate as due to strict citizenship laws the Rohingyas were denied NRCs. It was agreed that after the repatriation, both the countries would work together to prevent the 'illegal crossing of the border by the persons from either side'. When the repatriation process

began there were very few to return voluntarily. However, with the simplification of the repatriation process later there was a sudden rise in the number of those who returned. The second measure exodus of refugees happened in 1992 and UNHCR took part in providing relief and helped in the repatriation of the Rohingyas. Once again, the Myanmar Government agreed to the repatriation proposal but did not take the Rohingyas back as citizens but as 'temporary residents of Arakan'. Even in this phase, there was criticism of the repatriation process and many humanitarian reports pointed out the non-voluntary nature of repatriation. However, the Bangladesh Government denied the use of force. Why did Bangladesh accept the proposal when the Rohingyas were not repatriated as citizens? Perhaps the Bangladesh Government thought that such an agreement would at least resolve the issue temporally, if not permanently.

On October 30, 2018 Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an agreement in Dhaka to start the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees to Myanmar which was scheduled to begin in November 15. Despite concerns expressed by the various rights groups about the continuing adverse and hostile situation for the Rohingyas in Myanmar, the Bangladesh Government decided to go ahead with the plan and started the registration of the Rohingyas which generated fear among the Rohingyas residing in the camps that they might be sent back. The human rights group, Fortify Rights reported that Bangladesh security

forces threatened and physically assaulted the Rohingya leaders to collect 'Smart Cards' containing biometric data. (Fortify Rights, 2018) The 'Smart Cards' were being issued from June 2018 by the UNHCR and the Bangladesh government for proper documentation of the refugees and to ensure better access to services and assistance. The cards affirm in writing that the Bangladesh government will not force returns to Myanmar. However, this had already generated fear among the Rohingyas that they might be repatriated based on the verification mechanism of the cards. The issue of repatriation created panic and according to Fortify Rights one man on 3 November tried to commit suicide after hearing that his family is on the list of the 2000 Rohingyas to be sent back. They fear that they might be killed or would return to an uncertain and threatening life in Myanmar with their land confiscated, houses burnt down and without the assurance of a citizenship. The Myanmar officials hold that those who would return would be placed in temporary 'transit camps' and would be sent to their respective villages after a verification of their address. However, many of the villages from where the Rohingyas fled were now in use for military camps and other infrastructural project. The scheduled repatriation on November 15 failed because those who were supposed to be sent back hid in the different camps and nearby jungles to escape repatriation. This has further put the process of repatriation initiated by Bangladesh and Myanmar under question. As of now Bangladesh is continuing with the diplomatic efforts with Myanmar to ensure a

'voluntary, safe and dignified' return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. This is the third repatriation process since the Rohingya influx began in 1970s and in all likelihood it would not be resolved soon. (Dhaka Tribune, 2018)

The Rohingya in Bangladesh live a tenuous life in the overcrowded camps without proper sanitation, health facilities, freedom of movement and livelihood. The situation of the women are more precarious. Often they get help from the locals, for example in enrolling their children in regular schools and colleges using the status of the Bangladeshis. However, their presence also creates tension with the local community who have divided opinion about the Rohingya. Some think that the daily commodities and services became costlier because of the excess of demand and short supply generated by the huge number of the Rohngyas. The locals also complain that many Rohingyas are rich compared to them as they have very good mobile phones and often blame the Rohingya for their situation as their boys attacked the military in Myanmar first. An Xchange survey on the Bangladeshi perspective, which shows how the two communities try to get on with each other, also points out the security concerns and complaints of the locals such as increase of robbery and drug trafficking after the arrival of the Rohungyas. The Survey concludes-

> The government's focus on a policy of repatriation rather than integration, has made it difficult for both communities to mix in healthy and

> meaningful ways and move forwards; both communities have been left to their own devices to survive and co-exist, which can be seen in the concerns expressed by the local Bangladeshi communities in the survey results.   (Xchange, 2018)

The Rohingya also provide cheap labour. Although they are not allowed to work, the Rohingya often participate in informal market which further alienate them from the local community. The view that the Rohingya steal the job of the locals can also be found in the way Bangladesh views the issue of the boat people in Malaysia. The younger Rohingya who are frustrated with the constricting life in the camps without jobs become desperate to escape and try to migrate to Malaysia or India. Madhura Chakrabarty's study of the Rohingya in Bangladesh camps shows that the parents of the community often find their teenage boys missing and only later they come to know that their sons tried to migrate to Malaysia. As Bangladesh is one of the highest migrant labour exporting countries in the world, the Rohingya illegally migrating to the South-East Asian countries for job caused consternation about foreign remittances. The repeated reference to the push and pull factor by the Bangladesh officials, that the Rohingyas use Bangladesh as a launching pad for migrating to another country, undermines the pressing issue of the Rohingya as political asylum-seeker and try to project them as economic migrant. Madhura Chakrabarty further points out that

much of the writing of the Bangladeshi scholars and the mainstream media look at the Rohingya from internal security perspective. Thus, the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh are viewed as recruiting grounds for the Islamist militants and the Rohingya are characterised as 'threatening the moral and economic fibre of Bangladeshi society'. The arrival of Rohingya is thus viewed as destabilising the border region and damaging the strategic bilateral relation with Myanmar. Thus, the Rohingya, whether in camp or outside, whether documented or unregistered has to straddle a life of insecurity and precarity, and has to deal with harassment or constant fear of being sent back to Myanmar. Farzana writes-

> Within Myanmar they are stateless, and beyond the border, in Bangladesh, they are refugees. Rohingya refugees, documented or undocumented, in Bangladesh suffer doubly, from statelessness and refugee-hood. For those in refugee camps have no idea when their refugee-hood will end. For Rohingyas who live outside the camps as illegal migrants, their plight and risk is even greater. Although staying in one place, their movements are highly restricted, and their life is put in stringent confinement. (Farzana 2017, 81)

Thus, to escape such a confinement the Rohingya try to migrate to South-eastern countries like Malaysia or Thailand. More often than not they seek refuge in India and the subsequent section is devoted to their experience in India.

Postcolonial State Branding Rohingya as Persona Non-grata and Terror Suspects

The stateless Rohingya come to India mainly via Bangladesh after staying there for some time, often few years in search of security and livelihood. The precarious condition in the camps in Bangladesh and lack of employment opportunities as well as increasing hostility towards them by the Awami League Government make them desperate to cross the border of North-Eastern part of India often through the help of the human traffickers. They come to India as refugees, as asylum seekers and for livelihood. But their desperate journeys end up in slums and unauthorised colonies with no access to proper sanitation, food, drink and shelter. Although there is the difficulty of enumerating the exact number of Rohingya in India because of the huge number of undocumented refugees and asylum–seekers in India, available figures put the number between 40,000 and 50,000. However, various unofficial reports put the number estimating over 100,000. The Rohingya in India are distributed in various parts across India. The highest number of the Rohingya in India is concentrated in Jammu. Apart from Jammu, the Rohingya in India are spread out in settlements across Telengana, Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and in some rural areas in North India as well as in the jails of West Bengal.

As per legal and administrative framework for dealing with the stateless persons, India does not have a for-

mal refugee policy in place. India did not ratify the 1954 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. However, India ratified such international bodies as International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (ICCPR) in 1979, Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 1965 (CERD) in 1968, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which India participated in drafting and also acceded in 1979 to The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 (ICESCR) which seeks to ensure certain social, economic and cultural rights to the refugees. India has also allowed to function and works with the UNHCR which provides the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) cards to the refugees which can ensure various protections and rights to the refugees in India. In 2011 the Government of India announced Long Term Visas (LTV) for Rohingyas and Afghan refugees and by December 2015 India issued over 98 LTVs to Rohingya refugees. (UNHCR, 2016). However, although India has often been praised by the UNHCR for its tolerant approach towards refugee, the lack of a formal policy framework makes the refuges vulnerable to the changing political climate of the country. Thus, refugees often receive what Ranabir Samaddar calls 'calculated hospitality'- a game of care and power. (Quoted in Basu Ray Chaudhury and Samaddar, ed. 2018, 120). The 1955 Citizenship Act of India that followed the *jus soli* mode of citizenship according citizenship to everyone 'born in India on or after the 26th January, 1950, regardless of

their descent, ethnicity, or national identity' (quoted in Basu Ray Chaudhury and Samaddar, 2018, 136). However, this inclusive citizenship laws were changed with the Citizenship (Amendent) Act, 1987 and citizenship was based on *jus sanguinis* mode. The citizenship claims were further restricted with the New Amendment of 2004 that forbid the 'illigal migrants' from acquiring citizenship through citizenship registration and naturalization. Thus, India following the 1946 Foreigner's Act and Indian Passport Act 1929 categorises anybody who enters the territory of India without valid documents as 'illegal immigrant'. On 8 January 2019 Lok Sabha passed the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 that seeks to provide citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan and the current BJP regime in Assam seeks to give citizenship to the Hindus out of the 40 lakh odd people who were not included in the National Register of Citizens (NRC). These changes, if finally approved, will have huge ramifications for the refugees and asylum seekers in India, particularly for the Rohingyas, who are Muslims, supposed Bangladeshi nationals and infiltrators, illiterate, suspected potential threat and viewed as veritable polluter of the moral fabric of the nation.

The Rohingya in India live in miserable conditions in slums and unauthorised colonies without proper health, sanitary and educational facilities and restriction of movement. After coming to India the Rohingya depend on informal family networks to get a place to stay in. They often try to go Hyderabad thinking that the majority Muslim city would welcome them openly. Their

other destinations include the camp in Jammu or New Delhi because of the UNHCR office there. Their journey though often meets with frustration. However, not all Rohingya directly approach the UNHCR after coming to India. Lack of knowledge of the presence of the UNHCR, poverty and continuous migration, as Sahana Basavapatna points out, can be the problem. (Basu Ray Chaudhury and Samaddar ed. 2018, 53). The UNHCR takes long time before issuing the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) leaving many with 'under consideration certificate' which leaves many illegally staying with their relatives who might have UNHCR cards. This puts them under the threat of getting picked by the police or hampers their bargaining power in the job market. Getting job is difficult and often language and cultural barriers get in the way. And the Rohingya often depend on the middlemen, landlords and humanitarian agencies and sometimes secures odd jobs like domestic help or security guard, rag pickers etc. Although they sometimes get material help from the Muslim organisations and international aid agencies, this does not facilitate their acceptance among the local community in the charged atmosphere of suspicion. Sometimes even the mandate refugees are spoken of in the single breath as Bangladeshis. Suchismita Majumdar's study of the jailed Rohingyas in West Bengal point out that sometimes the Rohingyas with refugee cards are arrested while they move out of Delhi to meet their relatives in jails in West Bengal. (Basu Ray Chaudhury and Samaddar ed. 2018, 102). Thus, even the refugee card cannot guarantee a safe and hospitable environment.

The Rohingya in India are viewed as a security threat, often alleged with links with terrorist organisations in Pakistan. Although there has been no proof of any link of the Rohingya in India with any terrorist organisation, they are always suspected as a potential target of radicalisation. Apart from viewing the Rohingya as a security threat, they are also viewed as drug peddlers and as connected with human trafficking. Thus, whenever any bomb blast happen at any religious site, especially at Buddhist or Hindu sites, the media promptly pronounces the judgement and there is witch-hunt of the Rohingya living in the various slums. After the Bodh Gaya blasts in July 2013, there were raids in the Rohingya camps in Hyderabad, Telengana. The situation became worse when in November 2014, Khalid Mohammed, a Rohingya Muslim from Myanmar, was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for inks with the blast in Kahrgagar of Burdwan district in West Bengal. This put the entire community under suspicion. On 10 February 2018, there was a suicide attack on the Indian Army base camp in Sunjwan in Jammu. BJP MLA and Speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Kavinder Gupta in the assembly directly blamed the Rohingya in Jammu for this, "Had these Rohingya refugees not been around the camp, the attack would not have taken place". And the media started a campaign against the Rohingya as security threat. Following this there was also an attack by the crowd on the refugee settlement

area. (The Wire, 2018) The politics between Jammu and Kashmir comes into play as the Rohingya are viewed as threating the demographic profile of Hindu-majority Jammu. At a press conference on 7 April 2017 Rakesh Gupta, the president of Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry declared the Rohingya as 'criminals' and threatened to launch an "identify and kill movement' if the government did not deport the refugees. (The Citizen, 2018) Such criminalisation of the Rohingya and the media portrayal of them as the potential threats and not infrequent portrayal of them in one breathe with Bangladeshi migrants hardly helps the Rohingya in Myanmar.

India deported seven Rohingya Muslims to Myanmar in October, 2018. They were without UNHCR cards and were viewed as illegal immigrants. Such a move has generated fear among the Rohingyas living in camps that they might be deported to Myanmar. The officials hold that India does not recognise the UNHCR card and has rejected the UN's stand that deporting the Rohingya violates the principle of refoulement – sending back refugees to a place where they face danger. The state authorities have been asked to prepare biometrics of the Rohingya living in India so that they could be repatriated. (Voa News, 2018). "Anyone who has entered", The Reuters quoted A. Bharat Bhushan Babu, a spokesman for the Ministry of Home Affairs "the country without a valid legal permit is considered illegal. As per the law, anyone illegal will have to be sent back. As per law they will

be repatriated". (Reuters, 2018) The majoritarian agenda pursued by the current regime of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah duo places the issue of repatriation of the Rohingya along with the migrants from Bangladesh as a populist measure for garnering electoral dividend for the upcoming General Elections in May 2019. Addressing an election rally in the central state of Madhya Pradesh on 6 October 2018, BJP chief Amit Shah said that all illegal immigrants were "like termites eating into the nation's security". Shah further added, without specifically mentioning any group of migrants, "Elect us back next year and the BJP will not allow a single one of them to stay in this country," (Reuters, 2018). No wonder, the future of the Rohingya in India remains uncertain and tenuous.

Postcolonial Crisis-Subaltern and the Refugee Crisis

In this paper our attempt has been to narrate the seemingly un-narrated, or under-narrated and in that way we are trying to question the inadequacy of existing postcolonial theoretical coordinates that subtend dominant academic positions on postcolonial studies. Even the very category of the subaltern which figures as an axiomatic category in any configuration of postcolonial or decolonial theory, we argue needs to be reconfigured in view of the terrible reality of refugee exodus that we witnessed in the last couple of years. We reen-

gage here the views of Hannah Arendt in her seminal work, The Origins of Totalitarianism, where she writes of the production of 'homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth' in the first half of twentieth century because of the totalitarian and destructive ideologies and movements such as anti-Semitism, Stalinism, imperialism etc. Arendt calls these new groups of people in German the 'heimatlosen', the stateless. Borrowing Arendt we have narrated here the story of the contemporary "heimatlosen" the Rohingyas and think that the Rohingya tragedy has thrown open new theoretic and ethical responsibilities today. Time has come for us to reconceptualise existing theoretic categories from the lived border experiences of the refugees and we argue that the category of the subaltern should be re-conceptualised from the precarious and unwanted figure of the stateless Rohingya.

Subaltern Studies project was launched in the 1980s with the specific aim of rectifying the 'elitist bias' in Indian historiography. It sought to brought in the voices of the hitherto unrecognised 'subaltern social groups and classes', such as the peasants, the adivasis, etc., as the 'makers of their own history', autonomous of elite intervention. The project continued for three decades with twelve volumes published from Oxford University Press and Permanent Black, gaining world-wide recognition. However, in his 2012 article "After Subaltern Studies", published in *Economic and Political Weekly,* Partha Chat-

terjee declared that the project is over. He thinks that although the questions raised by Subaltern Studies are still relevant, but the methodological and conceptual framework offered by the collective is insufficient to answer the questions in the contemporary. He talks about 'new projects' in 'new times'. In his article, "Subaltern Studies in Retrospect and Reminiscence" published in 2013 and which can be viewed as his response to Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty importantly distinguishes between *Subaltern Studies* as the series of publications initiated by Ranajit Guha which is over and Subaltern Studies as the field of studies which he thinks is 'not dead or extinct by any means'. He writes-The field is a much larger and more enduring phenomenon than the series that originated from very particular times and authorial intentions. The general interest in the lives and politics of the subaltern classes that Subaltern Studies stoked is here to stay, whether or not we agree with particular authors and their contributions in the field.(Chakrabarty 2013, 23)

Recently there have been also publications of two important special issues. In 2014, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* published the special issue titled The "Subaltern after Subaltern Studies", and in July, 2015 *Contemporary South Asia* published the special issue on "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance". Joining the debate we argue that the resurgence of xenophobic nationalism and majoritarian identity politics within postcolo-

nial countries has otherised and alienated a large number of the minorities who are being forced to live a life of violent torture, insecurity and statelessness. As we said earlier, Aung San Suu Kyi, herself a postcolonial leader, looks like a neo-colonial matriarch now through her silence on the Rohingya Muslims question and her inaction or collusion with the Myanmar military junta legitimises indigenous state brutalities by pushing the Rohingya Muslims into a no-where-citizen condition. This new crisis of postcolonial precarity demands a rethinking of the postcolonial theoretical optics. Our attempt in this paper has been to map these emerging domains of precarities and subalternities in order to re-theorise the subaltern question today. The Subaltern Studies project replaced elitist historiography with subaltern historiography but we argue for renewing/ re-conceptualising the category of the subaltern through a critique of ethno-regionalism or identity-centric border vigilantism so that we can focus on trans-borderal/global solidarities rather than foregrounding the originary category of the postcolonial nation. This retheorisation of the subaltern question in our view would deepen the question of postcolonial justice and citizenship rights.

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From Epistemic Translations to Decolonial Encounters: Towards an Ethics of Reciprocity in Academia

Amanda González Izquierdo

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Ethnographer," protagonist Fred Murdock is a graduate student at a North American university. He is interested in Amerindian languages and a professor suggests that Fred go spend time in a tribe and live among the Amerindians and discover their secrets. After having done so, Fred was to go back to the American university and write his dissertation and scholars would make sure that it was published. Fred goes to live among "red men" and after two years the secrets are revealed to him. When he returns to the university, however, he refuses to divulge the secrets (Borges 1999, 334-35).

Borges' story points us towards the extent to which academic research on marginalized communities often functions on the basis of extractive knowledge[1]. That is, knowledge, researchers and the bodies of research are positioned within a hierarchy of power. The researcher, an agent, is expected to seek out information from the "research subjects" and bring the information he collects back to the academy[2]. He then synthesizes it through writing about it and makes meaning of it through that act of writing, an act which also serves the purpose of making the subaltern knowledge coherent and consumable for a privileged audience. In this model, the knowledge extracted from subaltern people is only produced as meaningful as a consequence of that extraction, marking these communities as objects (as opposed to subjects) of research. Research thus conducted is inherently colonial and, by extension, epistemically unjust because the denial of subjectivity is simultaneously a denial of these communities' role as knowers and as knowledge-producers.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos theorizes that "Modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking" that draws a metaphorical though geographical line between the side that can produce knowledge and the side that cannot exist in any comprehensible way. The line separates North and South epistemologies: the former produces Truths and the latter is not epistemically relevant, providing only raw data for digging and processing by the

North. De Sousa Santos further notes that "what most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is...the impossibility of the copresence of the two sides of the line" (2007, 45). In other words, in the logic of abyssal thinking, the South exists as the site of raw materials and as infertile ground for knowledge production. It is the North that can create and produce, and modern Western thinking is predicated on the denial of subjectivity of and the epistemic injustice towards non-Western thinkers. Consequently, in order for knowledge to exist from the South, it must be appropriated by and (re)produced through epistemic systems of the North[3].

Whenever academic research functions in the logic of abyssal thinking, there is a continuation of epistemological coloniality, since relations of domination surface and are upheld[4]. Through the extraction of knowledge and the subsequent interpretation, Western scholars appropriate non-Western epistemologies and control how they are (re)presented. This presentation is for a Western audience, and the non-Western subjects who supplied the knowledge are neither present nor acknowledged in its architecture. Therefore, if there is any instance of misinformation, misinterpretation, or mistranslation, there are no representatives from the communities of research that can rebut or clarify. Moreover, scholars are rewarded for their work: they are paid, published, invited to speak in conferences, and/or benefit in some other way from their extraction. The communities from which the knowledge was extracted receive no such compen-

sation. Lastly, because of the absence (the exclusion justified by fictions of epistemic nonexistence) of subaltern knowers in Western academic spheres, Western researchers can claim the knowledge they extracted as their own intellectual production and ownership, further radicalizing the abyss that divides and distinguishes spaces of elaboration of knowledge. We see, therefore, that there are colonial structures at play in research focusing on subaltern people.

This kind of research, however, is not just an extraction. In Borges' story, for example, we can say that an extraction occurred: Fred acquired the secrets of the Amerindian peoples among whom he was living. However, since he refused to share the secrets, we can argue that he did not fully conform to the coloniality of research. It follows, then, that coloniality in this sense requires two processes: an extraction and a translation. It is the extraction coupled with the act of moving the knowledge from a minoritized place to a metropole (or, moving the knowledge across the abyss from one side of the line to the other) that marks the violence of coloniality by revealing the exercise as a one-way process: The knowledge is brought unidirectionally into Western languages and spaces for Western consumption and there is no kind of reciprocity.

With some context already laid out, it is useful to expand the notion of extractive knowledge. Minority epistemologies are not only extracted through the kind of research

Borges illustrates. Though the power imbalance of extractive knowledge is perhaps most clear with real-life Fred Murdocks, it is nonetheless present in non-research contexts. The focus of this paper is extractive knowledge, which means that though I will examine research, it is not the sole focal point; in fact, I shall also be discussing more traditional ideas of translation, such as linguistic translation. This paper, then, is an exploration of the movement (translation) of knowledge, of the linguistic translation of non-Western works into Western languages, and of linguistic translation itself as a form of movement of knowledge. All these examples fall into what I will be calling epistemic translations[5].

Throughout this paper, I have been arguing and will continue to argue that extractive knowledge and/as epistemic translations are logics of coloniality and inherently epistemically violent. From this basis, I consider how epistemic translations can be decolonized so that we can arrive at postcolonial cognitive justice in the field of academic research. If epistemic translations are violent and uphold the structural inequalities that are the legacies of colonialism, what are the ways in which we can establish reciprocity so that non-Western peoples are not the objects from which to extract knowledge, but subjects with agency in a two-way, just process of sharing and creating knowledge? In other words, how can we have, in place of epistemic translations, decolonial epistemic encounters[6]?

It is important to note that the scholars who focus on issues of subalternity do not do so with the goal of aiding the survival of the injustices of coloniality. On the contrary, these academics often research the conditions and experiences of non-Western communities because they want to understand these people's lives and the effects that coloniality has had (and continues to have) on their existence. Indeed, "many researchers, academics and project workers may see the benefits of their particular research projects as serving a greater good 'for mankind,' or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community (Smith 1999, 2). Perhaps for this very reason, they are not cognizant of the ways in which their work may simultaneously be sustained by and vindicate epistemic coloniality (which is, as hopefully clear by now, ethically unjust). This can explain why researchers may trust their disciplines and fields and not be incentivized to question their very methods.

However, even when they may have the best intentions, academics are often thinking *about* rather than thinking *with* subaltern people. In their studies, many scholars "silence the subaltern by (re)presenting them in discourse in which they have no speaking role" (Maggio 2007, 422). By engaging in practices of extractive knowledge, scholars reduce subaltern peoples to objects from whom to obtain knowledge, instead of engaging with them as subjects with whom to create knowledge. Moreover, by presenting their research in ways that exclude the bodies

of their research—often through not just geographical but also linguistic barriers—scholars prevent the subaltern from speaking and from claiming agency. It is not only that scholars tend to think *about*, but that they tend to speak *for* subjugated communities. Their epistemic translation, then, "se parece más a un trabajo de ventrílocuo que a un trabajo de traducción" ("is more akin to a work of ventriloquism than a work of translation") (Inclán Solís 2016, 70; my translation). In this way, even efforts to shed light on non-Western epistemologies contribute to the colonial fiction that the world is mono-epistemic: that, as Walter Mignolo writes, "if my truth and objectivity is not that of others, then those others should be converted to my own objectivity" (2011, 61).

Though the work on subalternity by scholars is not always an attempt to convert others' epistemologies, it is nevertheless a transcreation. This is because:

> Whatever we seek and might find locally will have to be explained in English and in terms of the established academic tradition, otherwise it simply does not 'make sense' to outsiders. The local voice, if heard at all, will only be taken seriously if judged and legitimised in terms of the accepted standards already established. The homogenising power of academic globalisation renders 'local' ethics as an interesting variation on the normative tradition with which it is always compared. (Naude 2017, 2)

Epistemic translations are not only the process of taking knowledge from one place to another (from the side south of de Sousa Santos' abyss to the side north of it). This would in fact be just a transposition. Epistemic translations are the results of a transposition and a transcreation[7]. As I envision these processes, transposition is the carrying over of non-Western epistemologies into Western contexts and transcreation is the re-production of these non-Western epistemologies with/through Western epistemological frameworks. The effect is a homogenization of knowledges so that they all fit within a grander scheme of Epistemology[8]. This does not mean that all traces of alterity are erased; however, it does mean that they are at least greatly reduced.

In "The Formation of Cultural Identities," Lawrence Venuti writes: "translation is often regarded with suspicion because it inevitably *domesticates* foreign texts, inscribing them with linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituencies" (1998, 67; my emphasis). Epistemic translations do not just reword foreign knowledges to make them accessible to Western audiences. The domestication is not just a making intelligible; it entails a taming and a controlling. Epistemic translations bring non-Western knowledges into Western homes, thereby homogenizing them into Epistemological projects. These knowledges are still "other" epistemes, but they are adopted into the established academic tradition (a la Naude), which in turn grants them

objectivity (a la Mignolo) through/thanks to legitimization by the established academic tradition. In so doing, colonial power is at play because there is a marking of non-Western knowledges as needing to be legitimized and welcomed into the field of epistemology by Western value systems. There is, therefore, an upholding of inequalities and so "the scene of translation is one of violence and domination" (Conisbee Baer 2014, 236). This violence and domination are precisely the attempt to cement the idea that there can be no copresence of the two sides of the abyss as de Sousa Santos theorizes.

It is important to emphasize that in contexts of research, upholding inequalities is not always the goal. As I previously noted, many academics see emancipatory possibilities in their work. That said, coloniality is structural, which means that it is at play even when the objective is not to engage in its politics. It is imperative to recognize this because it is this very acknowledgement that reveals that doing work on or about subalternity and/or translating subaltern texts are not themselves decolonial praxes, even if/when they are intended to be. There can be no decoloniality—which is to say, there can be no epistemic justice—without a restructuralization because any work that does not attempt to subvert underlying coloniality will remain unidirectional and ultimately unethical and unjust. Through academic work focused on subjugated peoples, "colonized bodies become present (materialize) as they attempt to produce meaning, but the subaltern

fail to properly signify because the codes of signification are already established within imperial grammar itself" (Carcelén-Estrada 2016, 59). Academic work reveals to us that colonized bodies produce their own epistemologies, but it maintains those epistemologies to be inferior when it resorts to imperial epistemological frameworks to legitimize them, instead of recognizing them as "legitimate a priori" (Sepie 2014, 279).

How do we engage with subaltern epistemologies without inadvertently upholding coloniality? What's more, how do we engage with them in specifically decolonial ways? The answer is not to stop translating works or to halt research on the subaltern condition altogether. Instead, the solution is to go about these exercises differently, in a way that fosters exchange as opposed to domination. Doing so will ensure that subaltern peoples are not just given visibility, but also dignity and the status of knowers on hierarchically equal grounds to Western knowers. This requires a thinking and acting otherwise that is not epistemically unjust. Decolonial work on subalternity is not just a carrying over; rather, it is a carrying over while bringing/giving something back: it is reciprocal and bidirectional.

Let us begin with an exploration of ways in which to decolonize linguistic translations[9]. I venture to argue that perhaps it is the transcreation part of the process of epistemic translations that can be deemed most clear-

ly about dominance. Thus, the way to counter it would be to stop re-presenting minority epistemologies with Western epistemological frameworks. The question becomes: if we are using Western languages, how can we keep from using Western epistemologies to account for non-Western knowledges? The answer might lie in not being too faithful to Western grammars. Indeed, "imperial translation seeks to transpose triumphantly (paraphrase, rewrite, reorder) the colonized subjects into the grammar of empire" (Carcelén-Estrada 2016, 59). Therefore, it seems that a way to break with coloniality is precisely to subvert Western grammar so that instead of a transcreation we have a transexpression, if you will. By "transexpression" I still mean a movement from one place to another (in this instance, also from one language to another) but without creating the text anew to fit within larger Epistemological projects. In other words, instead of a re-presentation (presenting again, but with Western knowledge systems), transexpression connotes (at least in the way I intend it) a presentation in Western languages but still with and as a non-Western epistemology in a way that highlights the legitimacy of that alterity.

In her chapter in *Decolonial Approaches to Latin American Literatures and Cultures,* Zairong Xiang notes that whenever the Nahua deity Ometeotl is translated into English or Spanish, the identity of this divine being is met with some "gender trouble" (2016, 43). Ometeotl is a god(dess) of duality who possesses both masculine and

feminine qualities. However, when translated into English or Spanish, Ometeotl becomes a masculine god or dios and only male pronouns are used. Western epistemologies of gender are thus transfused into genderless Nahuatl and in this way, the divine being is transcreated rather than transexpressed. When Western epistemologies claim to be able to translate without the necessity to disobey and transgress Western syntax and grammar, it creates the illusion that Western epistemologies are universally applicable (which brings us back to the issue of the illusion of the world being mono-epistemic).

To counter this colonial fiction, the grammar and syntax need to be thought of as malleable so that they can be used playfully and so that they can be distorted. Translating non-Western epistemologies responsibly requires transforming Western languages. Perhaps a way to engage decolonially with the translation of Ometeotl in English would be to use gender neutral pronouns like "they" and to refer to Ometeotl not as god but as god(dess) to invoke their duality. Something similar can be practiced in Spanish: the uses of "el" and "dios" can be substituted with "el(lla)" and "dios(a).[10]" These are simple ways to transgress the gender binaries of Western grammars in order to be more faithful to the non-Western epistemology in translation. In fact, this very exercise points us to the alterity of non-Western knowledges and shows us that translation does not have to signify domestication. Having to shift Western languages to

translate non-Western knowledges shows us that the latter are not peripheral to the former but that they contest and defy the parameters set by coloniality. Once we have established and accepted this, translation is no longer unidirectional. Rather, a decolonial encounter occurs.

Instead of a one-way movement from non-Western epistemologies to Western systems, a subaltern "understanding is rendered in and even in violation of [Western] syntax, becoming transformed in the process but not entirely losing its difference from Western understanding" (Mignolo and Schiwy 2007, 16). In a translation that is not afraid to disrupt the language that knowledges are being translated into, there is no longer a movement from "object language A to subject language B" (Mignolo and Schiwy 2007, 25). Rather, there is an encounter of subject language A and subject language B in a borderzone of mutual transformations and where new avenues of thought open. In these borderzones, "translation is the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world…without jeopardizing their identity and autonomy, without, in other words, reducing them to homogeneous entities" (de Sousa Santos 2006, 132). These borderzones are the decolonial cracks to hegemonic Epistemic projects.

Decolonial ways to engage in epistemic translations are "responsible movement[s] towards not only accepting but understanding the radical alterity presented by Na-

tive ontologies" (Sepie 2014, 290). "Violating" language is not the only way to achieve epistemic justice. Another way to accept and understand alterity would be to translate "both the textual and the conceptual" (Augusto 2014, 634). In many indigenous communities, one of the main ways in which knowledge is produced is through oral literatures. The tendency with translation, however, is to translate written works. Since Western knowledge is produced through and in writing, the belief that all knowledge is likewise produced is itself a way to operate within the mono-epistemic structure of coloniality.

Accepting that epistemological frameworks emerge from different sources in non-Western thinking is a decolonial praxis. Translators could provide accounts not just of the stories being told but of the people who tell them, as well as how and in what contexts. This would be not only a method to transexpress the knowledge created by subaltern communities, but also a way to recognize the Other as a producer of knowledge that creates new ways of thinking collectively and through kinship. It would also be a way to recognize, accept, and understand that knowledge is not only produced in the academy, but that it is produced in communities by all kinds of people, not just those who signify "learned" according to Western ideals (Arias 2016, 81).

Thus, translating the textual and the conceptual sets the stage for a bidirectional movement whereby the West—

metonymic of power in structures of coloniality—gains non-Western knowledge and unlearns the narrow views of what constitutes knowledge. In the other direction, the non-West stops being considered a peripheral, lesser source of knowledge and there is a more equal epistemic ground being occupied by all knowers. I want to be careful here and not insinuate that the West bestows upon the non-West the status of knower. Nor am I proposing the benevolence of the West; rather I am calling the West into action to recognize and accept that non-Western epistemologies are valid, and that mono-epistemology is a fiction of coloniality. The decolonial encounter (borderzone) is a place of contestation that undermines colonial ways of construing knowledge and advances epistemic pluriversality (which is to necessarily say epistemic justice). That is, destabilizing the coloniality of knowledge implicitly means subverting the idea of a single totality of epistemology wherein Western thinking is universal. The decolonial borderzone highlights multiple, distinct, and local knowledges, histories, and ways of thinking and creating. In so doing, it problematizes universality and makes way for pluriversality, instead, whereby ways of thinking and doing otherwise coexist while unsettling Western ethnocentrism[11].

Destabilizing colonial ways of construing knowledge also means challenging the ways in which it is obtained. In fact, "the acknowledgement of the other as producer of knowledge has to be turned against us to question

our positionality as investigator or researcher" (Arias 2016, 92). The very recognition that the other is a producer of knowledge which is valid a priori and does not need Western scholars to legitimize it sets the stage for a bidirectional decolonial encounter. When Mariana Mora went to the Zapatista caracoles to do ethnographic work on life in Chiapas, she helped to foster the conditions for and involved herself in a dialogic relationship that redefined her research and her role as investigator. She recognized that the Zapatistas were knowing subjects and not objects to be explored and exploited for the sake of academic research. She executed her project not as another attempt at extractive knowledge, but as an engagement that had as its purpose sharing and creating knowledge. Mora accepted that the Zapatistas had a speaking role in this encounter and the methods of the research were decided collectively, in conversations between her and various Zapatista leaders and community members. The kinship that was formed and that created the conditions for knowledge production decentered the Western ethnocentrism upheld by the coloniality of research.

Mora first sent her proposal to a junta (one of multiple regional gubernatorial councils in charge of approving, rejecting, or modifying research projects on Zapatistas) and later it was examined at the caracol assembly by representatives of every municipality. Then, it was taken up again by the municipal assembly, which brought together representatives of all communities (Mora 2017, 218).

These gubernatorial bodies proposed modifications to her research plan, and thus the "process [was] partially defined by those on whose participation it depended" (Mora 40). The individual members of the village where she conducted interviews also took part in aspects of the decision making (Mora 2017, 218). The project was a collective endeavor between speaking subjects on hierarchically equal grounds. The conversations that emerged were only made possible because the research "was put to the service of the people and provided benefits to the communities" (Mora 2017, 41). Mora did not extract knowledge but partook in the deliberations that created the conditions for sharing epistemologies.

The Zapatistas' role in the encounter did not end with deciding how the research would be conducted; they also monitored the result of the research process. Juan Miguel de Santiago determined: "when you [Mora] have visited two or three communities, you will turn in a report with copies of the interviews so we can analyze them. The final text will be presented to the junta...and to all of the assembly representatives" (qtd. in Mora 2017, 40). I noted previously that when Western scholars extract knowledge and then present it to a Western audience, the non-Western subjects who supplied the knowledge do not usually have the opportunity to speak and write back to how the academy interprets their epistemologies. The Zapatistas, however, carved out the space for themselves to correct the instances in which Mora's ren-

dition of them did not adequately elucidate their lived experience. For example, Mauricio told Mora that when she wrote about the Mexican military incursions of 1994 and 1998, she should not write that people were fearful, but that they were enraged, because "fear paralyzes" but rage inspires action and defense (Mora 2017, 63-64). In so doing, Mauricio actively took part in the writing and the synthesis of Zapatista history. In demanding the change, he reclaimed and expanded his role into far beyond just being a participant of research: He enunciated himself as knower, thus assuming a speaking role.

The Zapatistas' political and ethical project is to reclaim the dignity that the coloniality of power took away (Mignolo 2002, 245). Part of claiming dignity is dependent on situating the self as agent with epistemic potential. The Zapatistas did not just engage with Mora's research as its subjects, but also as active members in a process that subverted Western coloniality. Though the Zapatistas allowed the translation (movement) of their knowledge, they reconfigured what it meant to obtain it. Thus, there was a challenge to the notion of extractive knowledge, and this simultaneously was and made way for a decolonial methodology of co-laboring that opened avenues of/for collective thought. No longer did the researcher occupy a position of power over the bodies of research; rather, everyone had agency, which meant that instead of a knowledge extraction, there was an encounter of and for knowledge production.

Since this was an encounter, it would be a mistake to pretend that only the Zapatistas were responsible for the decolonial praxis the research took. Mora did not just conduct her research as a scholar, but as a scholar activist. She writes: "because of my political commitments, I wanted this to be a collaborative endeavor and therefore understood that the proposed modification to the project formed a necessary part of the interactions" (Mora 2017, 40). Mora's acceptance of the Zapatistas' terms necessarily meant that she viewed them as agents. If she had been unwilling to see the Zapatistas as knowers, her entire project would have been epistemically unjust because it would have fallen into the logic of extractive knowledge. The decolonial encounter only occurred because of a bidirectional ethics that recognized that all parties had epistemic potential that could and would engage in a process of thinking, acting, and speaking with. Thinking back to Borges's story, I originally argued that Fred did not fully conform to the coloniality of research because he refused to divulge the secrets. With the considerations thus far discussed, I now propose a slightly different reading: it is not that Fred did not conform to the coloniality of research so much as he did not complete the process of the coloniality of research. The original argument of non-conformism is in fact better applied to Mora. Because she never engaged in extractive politics, she rejected coloniality altogether. Mora acquired knowledge ethically, ensuring epistemic dialogue and justice, and then transexpressed it: her project was decolonial in both theory and practice.

We have seen how a significant reason for Mora's research being successfully decolonial was that she and the Zapatistas reconfigured the frameworks for obtaining knowledge. Furthermore, they also redefined the translation (movement) aspect of the process. The bidirectionality and reciprocity of Mora's research were not only evident in the methodologies that were collaboratively deliberated and agreed upon. *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (2017), the book Mora authored with the knowledges created and shared with her, is currently only available in English. However, it is scheduled to be published in Spanish sometime in 2019. This means that the knowledge produced through that research did not just leave Chiapas to be translated (linguistically and geographically) into academic contexts divorced from the Zapatistas' lived experience. Rather, the Zapatistas' testimonies and epistemologies (and their testimonies as epistemologies) will find their way back to Chiapas[12]. What we have, then, is not an extraction of knowledge that travels in one direction towards a privileged audience, but an encounter of knowledge that travels multidirectionally, including back towards the place where the encounter occurred. Mora's book is not just the synthesized history of Zapatista municipalities and their insurgent movements and practices. It is also an account of their political actions in the very research that produced those syntheses, as well as a set of reflections that encourage interactions across communities and foster social transformations.

The forthcoming publication of the book in a language that makes it accessible for the Zapatistas is not the only instance of bidirectionality and reciprocity. In October of 2018, Mora was invited to speak at Rutgers University as part of the Rutgers Advanced Institute of Critical Caribbean Studies' speaker series "What is Decoloniality[13]?" During her talk, she revealed that she would soon be going back to the caracoles to teach a workshop focusing on the themes of social transformation that inspired, shaped, and were written about in *Kuxlejal Politics*. This workshop is an example of not just the methodologies of decolonizing research that took place in Chiapas, but of decolonial social justice (decolonizing research being itself a kind of decolonial social justice). Mora's workshop is a manifestation of how epistemology does not belong to academics divorced from the lived experiences of the bodies on whom the research focuses. It makes the statement that knowledge belongs to everyone and can be produced by everyone. In so doing, it highlights the dignity of the Zapatista communities and helps to cultivate the environment of continued social change and political training of younger generations. In the course of the research, the interviews conducted were intergenerational "so as to prioritize the circulation and production of social memories as part of [the Zapatistas'] continual political formation" (Mora 2017, 69). The workshop, then, by being aimed at younger people in the community, follows this same ethos. These

all demonstrate that the research and its various translations are not only respectful of Zapatista politics and benefit Zapatista communities, but support and seek to advance Zapatista autonomy.

Throughout this paper, I have been arguing against colonial ways of obtaining and disseminating knowledge and for decolonial encounters that are epistemically just. I have sought to show that research and linguistic translations that address subalternity exist within a structure of coloniality and thus, unless they are thought and performed otherwise, they inevitably uphold the violence and domination of hegemonic epistemological systems emanating from metropolitan centers of power. In so doing, I hope to have made clear that there is a need for movements that are actively and explicitly subversive of the colonial order and that orient themselves towards an otherwise. It is only through decolonial encounters that understand, accept, and uphold the dignity of subaltern knowers that a truly pluriversal and ethically viable epistemological framework can be produced.

Even then, an issue remains. The next line of inquiry should be a substantial review of work by subaltern communities that has addressed and critiqued epistemic coloniality. My essay has focused on the relation between Western academics and non-Western knowers and has argued for reciprocity in such contact zones of knowing and knowledge-production. However, rec-

iprocity does not only come in the form of conducting epistemically just research. Rather, it also manifests in the acknowledgement that those south of the abyss have already produced knowledge, independent of and before researchers arrived from the North. The work of non-Western people should not only be addressed when it comes to be in relation to the West. Rather, it should be acknowledged, studied, and valued on its own, with the recognition that it exists and that it is comprehensible both within and without relations with the West.

NOTES:

1. I say "much academic research" because not all academic research is inherently colonial. The very aim of this essay is to think through decolonial approaches to knowledge production. In fact, I conclude this paper by highlighting a particular example of research that was epistemically just.

2. I use "he" purposefully, since the status of "knower" has historically been reserved for male (white) bodies.

3. Let us briefly turn back to "The Ethnographer" to elucidate this point further. Fred's academic advisor told him to learn the Amerindians' "secrets," not to learn from them, or to learn their knowledges. This reflects the modern colonial notion that the South is territory for source material to be extracted, not for locally produced knowledge to be learned. Moreover, Fred was

to write about the secrets in his dissertation; in other words, his mission was to extract in order to produce in a Western context, which is to say to appropriate. We see, then, the logic of abyssal thinking and its inherent cognitive injustice displayed in Borges's story.

4. In the words of decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado Torres, "colonialism and decolonization are for the most part taken as ontic concepts that...refer to specific empirical episodes of socio-historical and geopolitical conditions...When approached in this way, colonialism and decolonization are usually depicted as past realities" (2016, 10). Coloniality is distinct from colonialism because it highlights the ways in which the logics of colonialism and its hegemonic discourses continue to exist even after declarations of independence. In this paper, I am preoccupied precisely with coloniality: with the totalizing ideas constructed by the West that result in the abyss and in the fiction that Western knowledge is universal.

5. For clarity, and to summarize the concepts that have led me to the term "epistemic translation," I want to define more succinctly what the very term means. I use epistemic translation to signify the movement of knowledge across linguistic and geographic borders. By employing the term, I also mean to connote a power imbalance between those engaged in the act of moving knowledge and those whose knowledge is being moved. Thus, epistemic translation is a subset of the coloniality of research and functions within the model of abyssal

thinking proposed by de Sousa Santos.

6. These encounters must be decolonial precisely because they must acknowledge, respond to, and destabilize coloniality. Indeed, "decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world" (Maldonado Torres 2016, 10). The ethics of reciprocity I explore in this paper concerns the creation of counter-practices. This ethics is the result of the recognition of the agency and epistemic power and potential of the "other." In so doing, ethical praxes necessarily dare to imagine an otherwise to coloniality that unsettles the fictional universality of Western systems of epistemology. They are therefore decolonial in nature.

7. I borrow both of these terms from Arturo Arias' contribution to *Decolonial Approaches to Latin American Literatures and Cultures* (2016, 82).

8. I capitalize Epistemology in this instance to signify a homogenized, hegemonic, colonial episteme.

9. I want to preface this by noting that I am not being prescriptive on how to do decolonial work. I aim to present what I consider decolonial practices that counter

the coloniality of research and knowledge, but I do not claim them to be the only nor the best ways to engage in decoloniality.

10. Feminist language reformers have proposed the substitution of "o" and "a" word endings that often signify male or female with the gender neutral "e." In the case at hand, Ometeotl could be referred to as "elle" and "diose."

11. My understanding of pluriversality and doing/thinking otherwise is informed by Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh's discussions of these concepts throughout On Decoloniality (2018).

12. There is, however, the problem that the book is only being translated to Spanish even though the Zapatista municipalities have six other constitutional languages. We could make the case that coloniality is still present since the only language of translation is itself a hegemonic (colonial) tongue. Therefore, we should be recognizing that measures are being taken to ensure access while still crafting a critique and taking issue with the lack of attention to the diversity of indigenous languages of the region.

13. In her talk, Mora was in dialogue with Antonio Carmona Baez and they discussed coloniality and decoloniality in Mexico and in the Dutch Caribbean, respectively. Both scholars then participated in a book pre-

sentation for *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (2017) and *Smash the Pillars: Decoloniality and the Imaginary of Color in the Dutch Kingdom* (2018). This presentation was held at Lazos America Unida, a community center in Downtown New Brunswick, NJ, and the conversations that emerged were between scholars, activists, community members, and students. Thus, the very nature of the presentation (which was organized by Nelson Maldonado Torres) was in content and structure a decolonial encounter.

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Post-Colonial Healing Through Environmental Justice: A Psychoanalytic Reading of J.M.G. Le Clézio's Literature

Suzanne LaLonde

> "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity."
>
> (Frantz Fanon)

1. Linking Post-colonialism and Ecocriticism Through Psychoanalytic Theory

According to Pierre Bourdieu, "literary fiction is undoubtedly, for the author and his reader, a way of mak-

ing known that which one does not wish to know" (Bourdieu 1993, 158). Post-colonial literatures seem well positioned to unveil that which we do not wish to know[1]. After all, they are products of colonialism, post-colonialism, and globalization and are steeped in issues associated with racism, sexism, and environmental degradation, among others. It seems logical therefore to use an interdisciplinary approach to study post-colonial literatures, especially since different systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing.

It is easy to make the case that post-colonial theory and ecocriticism should be linked at a fundamental level, seeing that our species remains in an apogee of colonialism and environmental exploitation. If in post-colonial narratives, we speak of genocides, in ecological narratives, we speak of ecocides. E.O. Wilson claims in his *The Social Conquest of Earth* that humans are the paradigm of colonizers: "We have conquered the biosphere and laid waste to it like no other spe-cies in the history of life" (Wilson 2013, 13). Since humans have been the very epitome of colo-nizers of the planet, the connection between post-colonialism and ecocriticism is most apparent.

A strong link between ecocriticism and post-colonialism hardly seems universal, however. In the anthology *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, the editors claim that "although ecocriticism overlaps with post-colonial-

ism in assuming that deep explorations of place are vital strategies to recover autonomy, postcolonial criticism has given little attention to environmental factors" (De-Loughrey, Gossen, and Handley 2005, 5). Huggan and Tiffin voice a more nuanced concern: "Ecocriticism has tended as a whole to prioritize extra-human concerns over the interests of disadvantaged groups, while post-colonialism has been routinely, and at times unthinking-ly anthropocentric" (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 17). This reading, if indeed true, appears irrespon-sible, consider-ing that the current global humanitarian migrant crisis is linked to environmental crises.

The need to establish a link between the two fields seems even more pressing in light of T.V. Reed's critical remark regarding ecocriticism: "The lack of a strong environ-mental justice component within the field of ecocriti-cism should be felt as a deep crisis" (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 157).This comment does not center on theoretical shortcomings of the field, a critical perspec-tive advanced by Timothy Morton[2]. Reed invites us in-stead to expand on the concept of environmental jus-tice, which means expanding social justice to include the natural environment[3].

Taking my cue from these criticisms regarding post-co-lonial and ecocritical theories, I examine the work of francophone writer J.M.G. Le Clézio (1940-) to bridge the two fields and cultivate a concept of environmen-

tal justice. In a creative twist, psychoanalytic theories are em-ployed to bridge them and define the concept of justice, since the destruction of the land in colo-nial and post-colonial contexts accompanies the destruction of the mind and namely, personal identity. (While Frantz Fanon has inspired this position, this article also draws upon the psycho-analytic research of Ernest Becker, Er-ich Fromm, Viktor Frankl, Homi Bhabha, and Shoshana Felman.) Fanon argues that for colonial empires, a hos-tile nature was no different from a rebel-lious people and that colonization was only successful once nature had been bridled with the people (Fanon 2005, 182).To his mind, the intimate connection between nature and the colonized also includes a shared pathology: "Imperial-ism, which today is waging war against a genuine strug-gle for human liberation, sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from our minds" (Fanon 2005, 181).

Le Clézio's *Desert* (2009) and *The Prospector* (2008) paint a portrait of "the colonized personality," to employ a Fanonian term (Fanon 2005, 182). The analysis of these novels revolves around three creative arguments: First, while it is standard for wilderness writers (Thoreau, Muir, Carson, and López, among others) to stress the "interconnectedness" between nature and humanity, this research highlights the notion of interdependence[4]. Interconnectedness emphasizes simple relatedness; in-terdependence accentuates a mutually dependent rela-tionship. This interpretation is novel, not only because

it breaks with the standard reading of interconnect-ed-ness, but also because it defines interdependence from a psycho-philosophical perspective. Namely, the concepts of development and freedom are dependent upon a universal adoption of these principles, including for the natural environment. If those enlightened notions are denied to large swathes—in the developing world and the natural environment—then they remain eclipsed in the developed world. They undermine their loftiness. Second, to develop and define oneself in freedom con-stitutes justice. This right to personal jurisdiction to "choose one's own attitude in any given set of circum-stances," to cite Frankl, applies to both the colonized and the natural en-vironment (Frankl 1984, 75). Thirdly, while it goes without saying that a notion of privilege pro-pelled colonizers to advance political, religious, and economic agenda, this investigation focuses on another form of human "privilege" in Le Clézio's oeuvre. Hu-mans living close to nature are "privileged" or "special", because they resemble members of a "keystone" spe-cies, an animal or plant that determines the very welfare of the rest of a natural environment. Indeed, Le Clézio's characters living close to the natural world in colonial and post-colonial settings are keen observ-ers of nature and thus capable of defending and speaking out on its behalf. Furthermore, and to return to Fanon, they also hold this special position, as they share the 'seeds of de-cay' that must be 'rooted out from their land and from their minds'.

2. Defining Justice and Nature

Before expanding upon these three critical suggestions, it is important to define two key terms of this research. What does it mean first of all to speak of "environmental justice"? Though the term "justice" is defined differently according to different contexts, there seems to be a fun-damental concept applicable to both humans and the natural environment. The Romans devel-oped their "Institutes of Justinian" in sixth century A.D. in which justice was defined as the "to give every man his due" (Institutes Justinian 2009).This definition begs the question of how to define "his/her/its due". In his *Discourse on Inequality* (1754), Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that both individual and collective justice is contingent upon one's freedom to connect with and cultivate the earth. Speaking about paternal authority over children, he argues that once a father grants his children their due, when he "despoils" his legacy (his land), "justice" and "mercy" are rendered (Rousseau 2014, 32). Echoing the core concept that justice consists of what is "due" an individual, including access to land, this research expands to include the concept of agency. Namely, there can be no justice if individuals or collectivities do not have agency to pursue their due. There can be no justice without freedom "to choose one's attitude in any given set of cir-cumstances, to choose one's own way" (Frankl 2006, 66). As we shall observe, the two charac-ters examined from Le Clézio's novels struggle and achieve their own way. Their attitude

and life's choices are intimately related to nature. Their healing from the trauma of colonialism is dependent upon nature and rendering nature's its due.

How does one define nature, in fact? Lest we rely on clichés about nature and nature writing, it is fruitful to turn to Le Clézio. He does not wax romantic about it. Storms strike coast-lines, winds of ill fortune sweep through villages, and insects attack and infest. Nature is the fire grown fierce after indentured workers throw their foreman into the sugarcane furnace; it is the black smoke that rises on all sides, smoke without fire, smoke that kills. It is those pitiful larvae like men crawling on this earth, only to stop and disappear in the mud (Le Clézio 1993, 264). In sum, Le Clézio breaks with other wilderness writers by emphasizing the often-cruel nature of nature itself, as opposed to following a romantic position of humans flourishing psychologically thanks to the aesthetic inspiration and even physical challenges nature provides. Humans are vulnerable to the power of nature and hence, even more dependent upon its laws than might be readily admitted.

He also portrays nature as closer to "home" (both physically and psychologically) to humanity. It is kindred to the concept of the universe. It isn't "out there". It is everything and everywhere, including ourselves, the sublime, as well as the commonplace and the destructive. Thus, when Le Clézio describes traumatic environmen-

tal destruction, he does not make a distinc-tion between the natural environment and human populations. He seeks to explore how the trau-ma is shared, especially for those living closely to nature. In short, he disrupts an anthropocentric view of nature, as he attempts to erase boundaries between the natural environment and human communities.

In addition to the themes of the power of nature (and the vulnerability of humans) and the inseparable nature of everything on the planet, Le Clézio offers a most par-adoxical reading of the vulnerability too of the natural environment. In his *Le Rêve Mexicain* (*The Mexican Dream or the Interrupted Thought of Amerindian Civilization*) (1993), he underscores first of all the con-flicting views of na-ture among the Spaniards and New World natives and the issues of stolen and destroyed natural resources. He then nuances this discussion by recounting the histor-ical legend of when the Aztec kings heard of Hernan Cortés's arrival on Mexican shores, they believed that the prophesy of the return of a blond and blue-eyed God, Quetzalcoatl, had been fulfilled and were driven to supply gold to the pseudo-God Conquistador. Ac-cording to Le Clézio,Cortés's success was due less to his sword and more to *la Malinche*, a native American woman who served as Cortés's partner, interpreter and advisor. She represents the historical fact that Spanish colonizers raped, enslaved, and separated women from their families and cultures. She symbolizes as well abso-

lute denigration, as she threatens her own people with violence and death[5].

La Malinche also encapsulates what has happened to nature when it betrays itself. Through colonization, nature has been used to destroy itself and others, while the powerful reap the benefits. Malintzin (the original name of La Malinche) and gold both came from the earth and were used to insure the submission and destruction of the natives. Nature, like the colonized, "gives his troubled and partial, but undeniable assent" to the colonizers (Memmi 1961, 88). In a position of vulnerability when confronted with the sword, pick, and axe, nature becomes an accomplice in the destruction of the natural environment, including humans.

To drive home this message, Le Clézio describes how the Spanish used to extract the fat from corpses of indigenous peoples on the battle field to employ it as a balm on injured horses before sending them off again to battle native populations again. In metaphorical terms, just as the small pox virus readily attacked humans by inserting their DNA into host cells on their own, they also benefited from a ride on blankets that Europeans had purposely given to indigenous peoples. If nature appears intrinsically destructive, all-encompassing, and even capable of serving as a traitor to life itself, then how can we begin to define our relationship with the natural en-vironment as one of interdependence? How

can we contemplate environmental justice, if nature doesn't seem to follow just laws? How can we talk about a shared quest for development and freedom, if nature seems to be governed by Darwinian laws red in tooth and claw? These ques-tions might motivate us to ask rhetorically: "Who needs nature?" Still, are these questions a way to "other" nature, to deprive it of its rights and for violence toward it to become normalized?

3. An Interdependence that Fosters Development, Freedom, and Justice

The character Lalla from *Desert* needs nature. She cultivates and luxuriates in a relationship of interdependence with nature in the Moroccan desert and shoreline. This relationship and her own personal development are motivated by a drive to heal from the trauma of colonialism. What does that traumatic experience look like? It is psycho-philosophical, namely existential. It is a wound to one's psyche. It is a "mental decay" to employ Fanon's terms again, that develops after "a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity" (Fanon 2005, 182). This blow to the core of one's being, forces the colonized to con-stantly pose the question: "Who am I in reality?" (Fanon 2005, 182). Relying on the power of nature and restoring nature in her own way, she seeks to become the active force in her life, to make decisions, and to assume the consequences of her decisions. Her quest to develop

herself, therefore, is not centered on some narcissistic drive, but rather on an attempt to decolonize her mind, to exorcize the Western mind that dominates her and the natural environment. As we shall observe, Lalla and nature receive their due in both Rousseau's and Frankl's sense. Justice has been achieved for both.

Lalla's personal development occurs gradually and consists of benevolent acts towards herself, other colonized people, and toward the colonizers themselves. She refuses, for example, to be married off to a city man who wears a fancy gray-green suit. Fleeing instead to the desert to develop a mysterious intimate relationship with a muted Berber shepherd, she learns to see the sea and the sky (Le Clézio 2009, 265). (It should be stressed that the man in the gray-green suit, kindred to apied-noir, represents the colonizer who can stifle the freedom of the colonized.) The narrator describes Lalla as a prowling dog, a cat, a bird of prey, and a wild animal looking for something. When big seabirds pass overhead shrieking, "Lalla thinks of her place between the dunes and the white bird that was a prince of the sea" (Le Clézio 2009, 235). The line between a classical definition of nature—as a sublime pastoral setting "out there"—vanishes in Lalla's mind and body. She is nature and contains nature within herself and neither does she attempt to fight that reality nor to make a Manichaean distinction between nature and herself.

If in Le Clezio's fictive world, nature appears as a wide horizon of "bodyscapes", land-scapes, seascapes and cityscapes, then Lalla's decision to move to Marseille can be understood as a natural step in her self-development. A wide horizon calls her beyond the "comfort" of the ine-briating light of the desert and toward the sorrow-ful darkness of the city. Her emergence from the desert gives her a sense of dread and anxiety: "Here there are no wasps or flies zooming freely through the air where the dust swirls. There is nothing but people, rats, cock-roaches, eve-rything that dwells in holes with no light, no air, no sky. Lalla prowls around the streets like an old black dog with its hair bristling..."(Le Clézio 2009, 234). She allows herself to be trapped by an abysmal feeling of meaninglessness and alienation, for the light of the desert can only fully be understood thanks to the dark-ness of the city. It is as if she seeks to experience this conflict knowingly. The more she faces it and seeks out her own solution, the more inner freedom and strength she gains.

The narrator describes, for instance, explicitly a process of self-transcendence: Lalla al-lows herself to "be swept along by the movement of the people; she's not think-ing about herself now; she's empty, as if she didn't re-ally exist anymore. That's why she always comes back to the main avenues, to lose herself in the flow, to just drift along" (Le Clézio 2009, 248). Le Clézio has created a fictional character to convey what Ernest Becker de-scribes in psycho-philosophical terms: "And so the ar-

rival at new possibility, at new reality, by the destruction of the self through facing up to the anxiety of the terror of existence" (Becker 1997, 89). Essentially, the self must be destroyed, brought down to nothing in order for self-transcendence to begin. In some respects, Lalla's self-transcendence is at polar extremes to the classical male romantic hero who seeks himself in nature. Lalla finds herself in the city where she is brought down to nothing.

Her eventual decision to quit her job as a maid in a cheap hotel for vagabonds in Marseille is an act that represents both a cause and a consequence of her striving to define herself. She takes a wad of cash from her earnings and spends it on new clothes. She appears nearly completely transformed. "Her eyes are sparkling with joy. There's something like a fiery glow to Lalla's black hair and red copper face. Now it seems as if the electric light has brought the color of the desert sun back to life" (Le Clézio 2009, 268). We are informed by the narrator in fact that she is "drunk with freedom" (Le Clézio 2009, 267). She must feel free, as Frankl reminds us, not necessarily from the conditions that imprison her, but rather because she takes a stand against those conditions, to echo the thinking of Frankl (Frankl 2006, 132).

Fear must also seize her, for she has shed the mask of otherness and poverty that used to hide her personality[6]. Even when she hid herself in "the shadow of rags, her handsome copper-colored face and her eyes were

filled with light" (Le Clézio 2009, 234). Nobody save the hotel's night watchman from Algeria could understand this. Once she redefines herself (ostensibly, at least) as a Westerner, she no longer is simply the foreigner living in poverty. The Western mind must struggle to define her, almost as if she defies a quick label. To combat the fear associated with assuming a new personality, she turns to the sun and wind for strength. "She mustn't hesi-tate; if she does, the giddiness of the wind and the light will go away, leaving them (her gypsy friend and her) on their own and they won't be brave enough to be free" (Le Clézio 2009, 270). The sun is not a strobe light that only illuminates a chosen few. The winds do not blow one way or another according to the color of one's skin or gender. Both the sun shines and the wind blows freely and restores. "When the sun starts going down in the sky, and the light is growing softer on the waves, on the rocks, and the wind is also blowing more gently, it makes you want to dream, to talk" (Le Clézio 2009, 275). Lalla relies on Terra Mater, the goddess of fertility and growth, to help her grow in strength, to decolonize her mind, and to feel free. She holds this force in her eyes, which is a product of the sea and the clear wide sky of the desert and is sharp-ened by the solitude and emptiness that freezes the face of the urban dwellers. Lalla's experience proves that it is not simply Romantic gibberish to consider nature a balm; it provides a source of solace and strength to those who have been down-trodden otherwise by human inhumanity.

If some may look askance at the new Lalla as she eats at a fancy restaurant, others are struck by her singular beauty. A photographer approaches her, and thus begins her career as a fashion model. It is short-lived, nonetheless, as she still resembles a cat that slips in and out of cracked windows. In other words, she still does not sell herself to the material expectations of the developed world. She wants her identity to float, not to be anchored by the weight of expected "looks" of the developed world. The narrator elaborates on Lalla's understanding of this: "Maybe it is the other being living inside Lalla, who is observing and judging the world through her eyes…"(Le Clézio 2009, 285). Her eyesight sharpened by the desert sun allows her to understand the world about which so many dream. She no longer dreams like other immigrants do. The dream is really closer to a nightmare and resembles what Bhabha writes in theoretical terms: "The colonized, who are often devoid of a public voice, resort to dreaming, imagining, acting out, embedding the reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice in their bodies, their psyches…" (Bhabha in Fanon 2004, xx).

With both a keen understanding of the rude reality of the "developed" world and nature's source of strength, she returns to North Africa. Once at home between the sea and the desert, she gives birth to a child in a remote space where only a fig tree assists in her delivery. Wrap-

ping first a belt around her waist and the tree, she relies on nature to serve as her midwife. She then takes the placenta and buries it in the ground, as if in repayment to *Terra Mater*. She understands that to exist, one must leave a restoring gift to nature. Our relationship with nature is one of interdependence. Existence and essence are defined by a natural legacy. Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" becomes: "I leave a gift to nature; therefore, I am," and this does not refer to a corpse in the ground upon which the worms can feed, but to a living tissue that will continue to nurture nature. Nature receives its due.

4. Fostering a "Special" Relationship with Nature

Like Lalla, Ouma from *The Prospector* does not view nature as an entity to be attacked, conquered, destroyed or consumed indiscriminately. Nature exists in her and constitutes her very essence. The narrator Alexis describes Ouma, who is from the Island of Rodrígues and an un-documented inhabitant of Mauritius (former Dutch and French colonies), as walking "supplely as an animal" (Le Clézio 1993, 187). He considers her to be "so wild and mobile" while "blending with the environment" (Le Clézio 1993, 191). She resembles a bird in flight that one is unaware of until it briefly blocks the sun (Le Clézio 1993, 202). She sprays herself with water like an an-imal taking a bath (Le Clézio 1993, 202). In short, to make a

distinction between nature and Ou-ma would be as il-logical as saying: 'I take a bath in water,' as one wonders, what else does one take a bath in? It is thanks to this more natural relationship that she is able to speak out on behalf of nature, sharing not only an intimacy with it, but also a shared experience of being colonized[7].

Ouma hardly seems to be cut from the fabric of Bhabha's colonized subject as described in his *The Location of Culture*. She is not an "Imaginary" (a transformed and im-mature subject, as in Freud's early formation of the ego) that has assumed a "discrete image" based on similar identities or equivalencies (of colonizers) (Bhabha 1994, 110). Her identity is organically as-sumed from the natu-ral surroundings. Moreover, if the "Imaginary" is dom-inated by "narcissism and aggressivity" (dominant strat-egies of colonizers), we can conclude that Ouma does not cor-respond to Bhabha's portrait explored above. Nor does she resemble his "alienated" and "con-fron-tational" colonial subject who is plagued by a sense of lack (Bhabha 1994, 110). Erasing her tracks as she walks in the forest, she defines herself freely according to the natural environment and does not suffer from any cravings, as is the case with her partner Alexis, a son of a plantation owner from Mauritius. Her "Otherness", centers on the dichotomy of living in harmony with na-ture vs. disharmony, which means inhabiting a realm of ignorance of and indifference toward the natural envi-ronment. Finally, Ouma offers a new take on Bhabha's

concept of "mimicry", which develops from a need for the colonized subject to integrate into the colonial and post-colonial world. Mimicry is a "recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 122). Ouma's form of mimicry consists of imitating nature (with no hints of mockery) for the sake of surviving. She has no agenda to exploit it, to prospect the earth for "treasures", like Alexis, the prospector. Unlike others governed by an inflated sense of self-worth and entitlement to rule over the natural world, Ouma's special status is one of connection and humility.

While Ouma puts pressure on Bhabha's concepts of the "Imaginary", the "Other" and "mimicry" in the colonized subject, these concepts can be applied in a creative way to the char-acter Alexis. This makes sense, since minds of the colonizers have been so profoundly colonized with an imperial ideology that they suffer from seeds of decay. (Far from sounding like an apol-ogy for colonialism, this position, as we shall see, is an attempt to understand the colonizer from a psycho-analytic perspective.)

Ouma attempts to teach Alexis in fact how to dwell in harmony with nature. This means remaining cognizant that nature is entitled to its "due", rather than seeing it simply as a natural resource to be exploited. When colonizers no longer prospect the land indiscriminately,

when they begin to consider nature as a separate entity to be respected, then healing occurs. The mind is decolonized from the narrow paradigm of colonialism. Ouma and Alexis live together in Alex-is's childhood home in Mauritius. From his perspective, this was "an exquisite dream" (Le Clézio 1993, 328). They seem to dwell in a paradise: "Nothing is complicated here. At dawn we glide into the forest, which is heavy with dew, to pick red guavas, wild cherries, and cabbages" (Le Clézio 1993, 328). She brings him heavily scented flowers. She puts them in her thick hair, be-hind her ears. Again, according to the narrator, she has never been more "beautiful..." (Le Clézio 1993, 329).

There is a caveat looming on the horizon, however, and this is where the psychoanalytic portrait of the colonizer (as opposed to the colonized) begins to unfold. Alexis resembles curi-ously Bhabha's "Imaginary" subject. He assumes first a "discrete image" of following Ouma's example of giving nature its due, but slowly realizes that his identity is "alienating" (Bhabha 1994, 110). Two pieces of implicit evidence support this reading of alienation. First, Alexis con-fesses: "We hold each other for a long time, standing under the trees that shield us from the signs of our fate... Ouma does not want to go back among the rocks. I cover her with the blanket and fall asleep sitting by her, like a useless watchman" (Le Clézio 1993, 331). He is a "useless watchman," seeing that he knows not how to keep watch with his senses

like Ouma. He still be-longs to the other world where the hand and the pan, the pen, the pick or better yet, the bulldozer matter more than the five senses. Secondly, as soon as Alexis realizes that Ouma has gone, as soon as the imprint of her body has disappeared from the mat along with the morning dew, he automatically goes to the stream "to wash sand in the pan", almost robotically, since that is what he is wired to do as the prospector (Le Clézio 1993, 332). By reverting to an automatic behavior, a sense of "lack" will develop in him. This occurs for the "Imaginary", when an identity is only partially assumed (Bhabha 1994, 110). Alexis's line of reasoning might consist of: 'If I feel so alienated in my new assumed identity, then at least I can embellish myself occasionally with nuggets of gold.' In sum, he is imprisoned in colonial thinking that consists of the unwavering belief that the land must be bridled, to return to Fanon's argument.

It can be argued, nevertheless, that a transformation does indeed take place in Alexis's mind. He claims that, "I carefully erase my tracks the way Ouma taught me, brush away the signs of my fires, and bury my waste" (Le Clézio 1993, 336). And upon learning that she has been thrown into a prison camp, he confesses: "I need her; it is she who holds the key to the pro-spector's secret. Now I have what I lacked before: faith. I have faith in the basalt blocks, in the ravines, in the narrow river, in the sand dunes. Everything here is a part of me" (Le Clézio 1993, 296). These statements lead us to believe

that he has decolonized his mind from the role of the colonizer. He seems to have healed himself, as he has given nature its "due", its freedom to exist without being prospected by his axe. With a new sense of connection with Ouma and nature, Alexis resolves to leave on a ship with Nada, as she "has shown me what I have to do, told me in her wordless way, simply by appearing before me like a mirage..." (Le Clézio 1993, 314). He explains: "We'll go to the other side of the Earth, to a place where we need fear neither signs in the sky nor the wars of men. It is an escape. Become one completely with na-ture, thanks to her. Now night has fallen" (Le Clézio 1993, 338). Alexis's words should be taken with a grain of salt, especially since "night has fallen" and "Nada" in Spanish means "nothing". We should question whether he has transformed himself truly. Has he really learned to live in harmony with nature? To give nature its "due"? Since Ouma appears before him like a "mirage", one has reason to be-lieve that she doesn't leave with him, and his confessions were disingenuous. Yet more im-por-tantly, the fact that he wants to escape with her suggests that he hasn't learned anything after all. His position is akin to the standard romantic hero who pines to escape into the wild to fuel his own narcissistic needs[8]. Further-more, if he takes Ouma from the earth, he is taking her as if she were gold, and she has already taught him not to take from the earth. If everything is a part of him (as stated earlier), then why must he escape? He must es-cape from himself. He must escape from "the feeling of

powerlessness, boredom and impotence which are the necessary results of his failure" (Fromm 1947, 220). He has failed to unite fully with nature, even though he feels deeply compelled to follow the example of his "Nada". It seems quite plausible therefore that although Ouma might have taught Alexis to understand nature in a new way, he still remains a prospector who searches to reap the physical treasures of the earth. His "faith" in nature is as ephemeral as sand dunes shaped by the ocean winds that lead him away to prospect in distant lands.

5. Final Remarks

If Ouma fails to convince Alexis about living closer to the earth as a way to heal himself from colonialism and to give nature its "due", then we must wonder about the notion of Ouma's privileged position. What good does her "special" relationship with nature serve, one might ask, if she cannot even convince her partner to transform his thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward nature? To be fair, one could advance the argument that Alexis might be so warped by colonial-ism that he can-not decolonize his mind. He is so alienated from himself that he fails to grasp how he could reunite himself with himself, that is with nature. Despite Ouma's inability to convince her partner to change his ways, her portrait re-mains invaluable. It has the power to play an im-portant role of raising "global consciousness" about "the twin demands of social and environ-mental justice" (Huggan

and Tiffan 2010, 35). It is also refreshing that the concept of environ-mental justice (rendering nature its "due") is linked to a decolonization of the mind (in Alexis's failed case) and to healing from colonialism (in Lalla's and Ouma's case). Finally, it is refreshing that Le Clézio breaks the stereotype of the hierarchy of colonial agents dominating colonized subjects. It is not a question, however, of Ouma and Lalla dominating the "Other". Still, it is clear that they appear stronger and more enlightened, since they share not only the wisdom of Mother Nature, but also the trauma of colonization. These literary portraits of strong enlightened women also defy some of the psycho-pathologies of the colonized described by both Fanon and Bhabha. From this position of belonging to and understanding the earth more intimately, they are able to guide others—the oppressors caught in a culture of oppression in a materialist world. Ra-ther than fleeing to the desert, where they will be thrown back into their own thoughts, Lalla and Ouma seek the company of others, other animals, as well as the rest of the natural environment. It is this dichotomy that serves as a powerful reaction to E.O. Wilson's assertion that the next era will be called the Eremozoic Age, "the Age of Loneliness" (Wilson 2016, 19). By "loneliness", Wilson is referring to an age that is dominated almost exclusively by Homo Sapiens and their domesticated animals and plants. Where are all the other flora and fauna that used to embellish our planet, one might ask? We have pushed them to extinction, that is, those of us obsessed

with bridling nature. Ouma and Lalla, on the other hand, preserve nature in a desperate attempt to bring to life what colonizers sought to destroy, giving us the impression that theirs is the Age of Interdependence. And to return to the beginning of this essay and to the pertinent discussion on the links between post-colonialism and ecocriticism, Lalla and Ouma remind us that the fields are defined by a shared ethical imperative.

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Notes:

1. In his *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton writes in fact: "Indeed, the most flourishing sector of cul-tural studies today is so-called post-colonial studies, which deals with Western narcissism" (Ea-gleton 2003, 6).

2. Timothy Morton in *Ecology without Nature* argues: "Ecocriticism is too enmeshed in the ideol-ogy that churns

out stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use. Indeed, ecocriticism is barely distinguishable from the nature writing that is its object" (Morton 2007, 13).

3. While it is true that other scholars (DeLoughrey and Handley2011) have examined the work of writers who have managed to unite post-colonial and ecological concerns in literature, this re-search focuses on one aspect of this topic: how environmental justice is fostered and namely by those who have been traumatized by the effects of colonialism.

4. For a complete synthesis of this issue, see Michael P. Nelson's "An Amalgamation of Wilder-ness Preservation Arguments" in Callicott's and Nelson's *The Great New Wilderness Debate*.

5. Albert Memmi describes poignantly this phenomenon in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: "The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two-partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppres-sor, a partial, unpatriotic and treacherous being, worrying only about his privileges and their de-fense; the other, into an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who is compro-mised by his defeat" (Memmi 1961, 89).

6. I am suggesting that this is a daring venture for Lalla, since it separates her out of comfortable 'beyonds' to

employ a term from Ernest Becker; she attempts to define herself in new terms, those that go contrary to what society expects from her.

7. By shared psycho-pathology, I am referring to the shared trauma of colonization among her an-cestors, people, and the earth.

8. Similarly, Shoshana Felman writes in *What Does a Woman Want?* about a 'woman's duty' to "serve as a narcissistic mirror for her lover and thereby to reflect back simply and unproblemati-cally man's value" (Felman 1993, 4). This points to an underlying rapport between women and nature, for the male mind at least.

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Constant Surveillance: Criticism of a 'Disciplinary Society' and the Paradox of Agency in Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire

Zachary Vincent Bordas

On December 1l, 2017, Akayed Ullah, a Bangladeshi immigrant, left his Brooklyn apartment and moved toward the 18th Avenue subway station (Fig. 1). There, Mr. Ullah headed to Manhattan on two different trains. While on the second train before detonating a pipe bomb hidden beneath his jacket, he posted a final social media comment on Facebook: "O Trump you fail to protect your nation" (Weiser 2018). At this moment, Mr. Ullah did not fear drawing attention to himself on social media, nor was he fearful that his every move was recorded on multiple cameras. His actions, both to detonate a bomb and to post anti-Trump rhetoric online, question the formation of an agency with respect to power. The

focus of this paper discusses the role of surveillance in both the creation of a docile society and the fight against crime, which I examine through a Foucauldian understanding of a panoptic society. Mr. Ullah's lack of concern about observation serves as my platform to discuss the literary representation of surveillance. I am interested in joining the debate about agency in relation to Foucauldian ideas of a disciplinary society— a society where the appearance of constant surveillance makes a person internalize and correct deviant thoughts and behaviors (Fontana-Giusti 88-9; Marks 2015; Mills 2003; Rosen and Santesso 2013; Haggerty and Ericson 607; Galic et al. 2016). By point of reference, I evaluate the relationship between surveillance and behavior, as well as the connectivity of power and agency. Mr. Ullah's subway bombing provides an entry point to my discussion of Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). Particularly, I examine the novel through my application of the recent criticism of Foucault's panopticon in David Rosen and Aaron Santesso's *The Watchmen in Pieces* (2013).

By application of my aforementioned example, the constant surveillance of Akayed Ullah (under a Foucauldian model) should have "coerced" him into normalcy. This is not to say that Foucault believes surveillance entirely obliterates crime and terrorism. Instead, he, by examining Bentham's prison model, mentions that the suspicion and uncertainty of being surveilled makes a person internalize and self-regulate atypical behaviors (1995,

201). In theory, Mr. Ullah should have been dissuaded from disobedience. He, nonetheless, detonated his bomb without forewarning or self-restraint. I am interested in scrutinizing how he, like the characters in Home Fire, manipulate surveillance. Mr. Ullah's actions do not warrant suspicion; instead, he, on the surface, appears as a normal citizen. I suggest agency, regardless of power, stems from the unpredictability of human behavior: manipulation of surveillance questions the extent of its power to predict or prevent resistance.
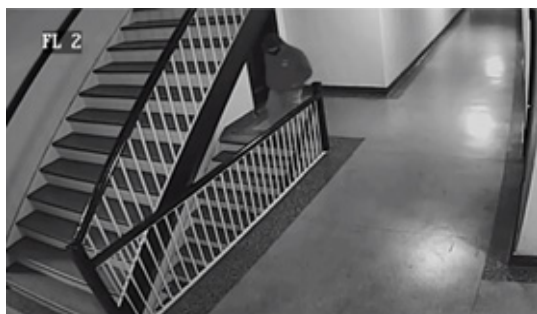
(Fig. 1 Stairs) Weiser/New York Times

As such, (Fig. 1) shows Mr. Ullah leaving his apartment and (Fig. 2) shows him entering the subway: it is imperative that the reader understands the importance of these pictures. The images indicate that neither the realization or influence of constant surveillance prevents his action—his malicious intention is neither "neutralize[d]" or "alter[ed]" (Foucault 1995, 18).

(Fig. 2 Turnstile) Weiser/New York Times

Nothing in the photos indicate that he is anyone but a regular citizen going to work. Mr. Ullah does not attract attention to himself by either chanting or praying, which makes his intentions impossible to predict. He masks his motive by manipulating the way he is seen. His unpredictable action is shocking because it is surprising. This shock value gives the images their importance because each snapshot has an ascribed meaning to it: disobedience or the willingness to accept any punishment for his actions. His narrative, however, only receives a story after the incident occurs—the images become important after the fact. The state and private surveillance, in Mr. Ullah's case, do not act as a corrective agent. This is not to say that surveillance completely stops all crime, a blatantly wrong idea; instead, Mr. Ullah's actions expose the gap between predictable patterns of behavior versus normal behavior. If his bomb vest were visible, then, by reasonable assumption, his

actions would have been stopped; however, he hides deviance behind a blue jacket of normalcy. Later viewers watch and assign a story to Mr. Ullah's every step because though he looks normal, he does the unexpected.

This paper examines the role of resistance and power in the formation of an agency. Mr. Ullah's actions in New York Subway are my point of connection that I use to examine the literary representation of unpredictability and character agency. Specifically, my analysis of agency pushes against Foucault's theory of power and surveillance, which is based upon his reading of Jeremy Bentham. Writing from Crecheff in White Russia, Bentham mailed a series of letters back to England in which he revealed his "new mode of obtaining power of the mind over mind" (1962, 39). In these letters Bentham addresses issues within England such as education, health services, and a rise in criminality, for which he proposes a solution that intends on "*punishing the incorrigible, guarding the insane, reforming the vicious, confining the suspected, employing the idle, maintaining the helpless, curing the sick, instructing the willing in any branch of industry, or training the rising race in the path of education*" (1962, 40). In LETTER II., he outlines the design for such a vexatious but industrial artifice, which for brevity I must not detail here. Instead, I highlight the purpose of his proposal as described in LETTER V. in which he details his "most important point, that the persons to be inspected should always feel themselves as if under inspection, at least

as standing a great chance of being so, yet it is not by any means the only one. If it were, the same advantage might be given to any buildings of almost any form" (Bentham 1962, 44). A thread appears between Foucault's reading and application of Bentham's panoptic model, as well as the application of an inconspicuous watchman beyond prison walls and into society, which goes beyond the scope Bentham assumed for his model. Subsequently, Foucault's expansion of his panoptic idea informs his view of power: "where there is power there is resistance" (*History of Sexuality* 1978, 95). If Foucault is correct, then power is contingent on a struggle over who has it, which, as Mills points out, if "resistance is already 'written in' to power, then this may seem to diminish the agency of the individuals who do resist... often at great physical cost to themselves" (Mills 2003, 40). One might argue that Mr. Ullah is an anomaly to this rule because most people do not hide a pipe bomb under their jackets; nevertheless, the question about agency remains: is his exercise of terror of his own accord, or is his resistance "written in[to]" the power of President Trump? Though Mr. Ullah is a flesh and blood account of this theory, I am interested in literature's discussion of the relationship between agency and surveillance; however, I must first outline a fuller understanding of Foucault's adaption of Bentham's ideas.

When Foucault first theorizes about the panopticon in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1975), he questions the

structure and placement of power via Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of a circular prison. Foucault focuses on the relationship of power between those who observe others (in a confined space, such as a jail, a factory, a hospital, and a school), as opposed to those who are being observed (1995, 204). From this reversible power, he speculates whether the breadth of this structure is limited to an architectural edifice, or does this power dynamic infiltrate society at large? If the latter, then one must ask whether or not observation (or the mere idea of it) has a role in fashioning a person's state of mind (by the internalization of discipline), which, by effect, influences his or her external action (*POWER* 1980, 105-7; Mills 2003, 45). Likewise, if agency relates resistance as an opposition to observation, then, by inference, character formation is either strengthened or hindered by his or her struggle against the monitoring by both state apparatuses, as well as private corporations. This makes hierarchical power structures suspect, which implies power relies upon opposition (Mills 2003, 40). Foucault's ideas about punishment cast light on this speculation. Constant monitoring, for him, (whether in a prison or society), is "intended not to punish the offense, but to supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind, to alter his criminal tendencies, and to continue even when this change has been achieved" (Foucault 1995, 18). His concept implies that a person's awareness of constant supervision will "neutralize" and "alter" that individuals desire to perform ab-

horrent behaviors– i.e., discipline "the self by the self" (Mills 2003, 43). Hence, Foucault states: "each individual thus exercise[es] this surveillance over, and against, himself" (*POWER* 1980, 155), which is governed by one's desire for "normalisation" (*POWER* 1980, 106). Does a character, therefore, form agency by his or her decision to self-discipline, or is agency already a factor within the overarching power structure? Foucault, in an attempt to answer these questions, states that a "disciplinary society" (*POWER* 1980, 105) means to encourage and enrich that "beautiful totality of the individual," which implies that this system's aim is not about subduing a person as much as it intends to "carefully fabricat[e]" a person into a docile citizen of the state (Foucault 1995,217).

Peter Singer shares his pro-Foucauldian insight on the issue of the panopticon's role in the formation of agency, which he lays out in his essay "Visible Man: Ethics in a World Without Secrets" (2011). He asserts: "if we all knew that we were, at any time, liable to be observed, our morals would be reformed...The mere suggestion that someone is watching encourage[s] greater honesty" (2011, 36). Yet, by using Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, I examine whether interpellation is a byproduct of different forms of surveillance. The novel's primary characters frequently challenge the idea that surveillance (or its appearance) creates compliant/predictable/outstanding citizens. By triangulating the relationship between power, surveillance, and agency, I challenge a Foucauldian mod-

el of a civil/paranoid citizen. I argue that the outward expression of certain behaviors can, at times, be viewed as manipulative tactics that understand and undermine surveillance's role in creating interpolated citizens. Agency, I suggest, is not only formed by one's resistance to surveillance, but I also argue it emerges from a person's conscious manipulation of how they are surveilled.

Before I dive into my criticism of *Home Fire*, I must lay the foundation of the text via post-9/11 England. Tony Blair, after a successful career as the leader of the Labour Party, became the Prime Minister (PM) of Britain in 1997. Before elected to his more prominent role, PM Blair championed controversial changes to the Labour Party's constitution. During a party speech he outlined the purpose of the proposed change to Clause IV, which he saw as a way of forging a new Britain, built on socialist ideas for the "common good;" whereas to "put power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the many not the few" (Blair 2004, 119). He furthers, "Globalisation is changing the nature of the nation-state as power becomes more diffuse and borders more porous. Technological change is reducing the power and capacity of the government to control a domestic economy free from external influence. The role of government in this world of change is to respect a national interest" (2004, 121). These ideas, during his tenure as Prime Minister, grounded Tony Blair as he led England through both the 9/11 attack against the US, as well

as the 7/7 attack on London. On 9/11, PM Blair succinctly outlined security measures instituted throughout Britain, as well as to show support for the US. Perhaps his most notable remark details his political ideology:

> As I said earlier, this mass terrorism is the new evil in our world. The people who perpetrate it have no regard whatever for the sanctity or value of life, and we, the democracies of the world, must come tighter to defeat it and eradicate it. This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free democratic world and terrorism. (Blair 2004, 215)

PM Blair makes clear his distinction between Western democracy from religious fanaticism, which he later (7 October 2001) justifies as his premise for joining the US campaign in Afghanistan. In this speech, he outlines the "three parts" of the mission: "military, diplomatic, and humanitarian" (2004, 217). He states, "we are assembling a coalition of support for refugees in and outside Afghanistan," as well as to assure that this war is not on Islam but terrorism (2004, 218-9). These ideas, three years later during his "Speech to the US Congress 18 July 2003," ease his consciousness concerning much of the terror inflicted upon the Middle East or at least he remains "confident [that] history will forgive" England's actions (2004, 250). This political turmoil informs my reading of post-9/11 Britain as portrayed in *Home Fire.*

I, for the remainder of this paper, examine different interactions with surveillance (based on class, religion, location, and power) as a means to complicate the formation of character agency in Home Fire. I argue that Shamsie's understanding of observation reveals a discrepancy between intended and unintended results of an idealized citizenry. Her representation of surveillance, as well as a specific underrepresentation, allows me to examine a few of the gaps and contradictions of reading her novel through both Foucauldian and counter-Foucauldian lenses. Particularly, I analyze the novel through David Rosen and Aaron Santesso's *The Watchman in Pieces* (2013). By drawing on their analysis of the panopticon, I challenge Foucault's panoptic model, which emphasizes that the appearance of surveillance makes people interpolate deviant behaviors and thoughts. Moreover, by applying the current criticism of a panoptic society, I examine the formation of literary agency: either of compliance or deviance. Lastly, I investigate the tactical nature of drone surveillance as a red-herring of governmental power, which questions whether location affects one's perception of surveillance. By way of clarity, I do not limit my criticism of any character to his or her individual section alone; I discuss the relationship between characters as needed.

Home Fire, a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone*, follows the tragic intersection of two families as they battle for agency amidst familial and religious profiling. The

Pasha family includes Isma, Parvaiz, and Aneeka– children of a former (suspected) Al-Qaeda terrorist: Abu Parvaiz. Their background makes each character aware that his or her actions are more prone to constant surveillance, which, on the surface, hinders their interaction on social media and their actions in public. At times the characters seem like valid representations of Foucauldian ideas of civil/paranoid citizens, yet closer inspection suggests that they operate under a Foucauldian model so as to manipulate and frustrate the purpose of power and surveillance of a panoptic society.

The second family includes a father and son: Karamat and Eamonn. Karamat is the newly elected Home Secretary of England, which prompts him to hide his Muslim background. His son Eamonn, during the first half of the book, is blind to many of the struggles of people who, unlike him, are not from a powerful and privileged family. His relaxed and advantaged lifestyle often confuses him about less-privileged-behaviors. Surveillance, for those marginalized, means something entirely different. Eamonn, near the conclusion, becomes aware of selective surveillance, which urges him to use his position to challenge Britain's hostility toward Muslims. Claire Chambers hints at this idea in her essay "Sound and Fury: Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*" (2018), she details the novel's use of *Antigone* to question the cyclical history of racial profiling: "Shamsie adds fresh layers to the classic by reconsidering the issues Sopho-

cles raised against the backdrop of racist immigration laws and radicalization" (2018, 208). The Pasha family mirrors these principles because they are caught in the middle of British politics. Their familial history of terrorism makes them atypical Muslim immigrants, which automatically obliges the necessity to act normal. Their self-discipline may seem like a Foucauldian representation of internalized behavior; however, I posit that their internalized discipline does create a compliant citizen as much as it does rebellious ones. I suggest that their performative normality hides their inward thoughts, which means they avoid unwanted surveillance by manipulating how they are surveilled and perceived.

Isma, from the start of *Home Fire*, confuses the reader about her role in the novel. Both her story and the novel begin with a familiar scene of a biased airport screening. She misses her flight to Boston, where she is a student at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, because she is forced to undergo a selective TSA screening. In a private room, while asked to prove that she "consider[s] [herself] British," her luggage is searched (Shamsie 2017, 5). This type of observation and invasion of a person's personal belongings, as well as his or her body, is often a volunteer-based process. Rosen and Santesso label this as "Surveillance in the State of Nature," by which they mean, "Systems try to draw people in, to make them relinquish as much of their absolute private autonomy as possible" (2013, 247). Their theory applies to airport screening; in that, people are generally fine with sur-

rendering privacy for a few seconds, as going through TSA body scanners, because it offers a sense of security knowing that radical others are thoroughly checked. Isma, even before arriving at the airport, already believes that she will be viewed as other, which is why she devises a plan to draw as little unwanted attention as possible. She is extra cautious to "not to pack anything that would invite comment or question— no Quran, no family pictures" (Shamsie 2017, 3). Isma, by not packing certain items, anticipates that she will be stereotyped and forced to undergo a discriminatory screening, which prompts her attempt to manipulate what the TSA will assume of her. She has no intention of evil, but she assumes that she will need to prove her innocence. The TSA show no knowledge about Isma's terrorist father; nevertheless, she feels obliged to appear as normal as possible. Her actions might suggest that she embodies Foucauldian ideas of self-discipline; however, I posit that she does not internalize any deviant thought or behavior. Isma understands how the TSA operates, which is why she hides certain aspects of her personhood from their gaze, yet she has nothing to hide about her intents. She has no record (outside her father) that should flag her for an extra selective search; instead, her appearance, versus suspicious behavior, subjects her to biased screening. She is categorized by a system outside her control.

The prejudiced use of technology fits the notion proposed in Langdon Winner's essay "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" in which he states, "Many technical devices

and systems important in everyday life contain possibilities for many different ways of ordering human activity" (1999, 32). This suggests, under a Foucauldian model, that airport screenings categorize certain groups of people for greater monitoring than others. The process of going through TSA means to moderate human behavior; however, this idea neglects Foucault's belief that "transparent building[s] are meant to replace the need for specific institutions for observation" (1995, 207). A 'disciplinary society' will not eradicate the need for screening rooms; instead, the *idea* of a back room intends to coerce people into acting a certain way. In Isma's case, she does not self-correct any deviant ideas or intention; instead, she internalizes the likelihood of screening. Her precautionary actions are scripted because of societal prejudice. Most people do not prepare beforehand how they will avoid or interact with agents if chosen for a TSA screening; they have never experienced continual *othering*— they have no need to manipulate surveillance. To further complicate the issue of a biased observer, Bentham's utopic notion intends for internal discipline to "eventually exhaust[t]" the need for an observer. (Galic et al. 2017, 12). This is not to say that self-discipling one's behavior is entirely synonymous with preventing crime, but it does suggest that society is meant to self-police. Yet, this raises the question about the possibility of such a society— can a utopia exist where one relies on the consistent self-discipline of others? Airport security merely exemplifies that this is not the case. Isma tries to avoid profiling, which is why

she anticipates and prepares for selective screening. Her actions, though subtle, are a way of resisting attention.

David Rosen and Aaron Santesso critique Foucault's idea with both laud and scrutiny: "An obvious strength of Foucault's model...is its ability to absorb innovation: each new advance in monitoring technology... seems to substantiate his vision of total observation and control" (2013, 7). Nevertheless, they suggest that Foucault mis-applies the size and scope of the prison model (Rosen 2013, 100). They note that Bentham believed that any panopticon must be "discrete and controlled" in con-fined areas, which suggests that he never intended for his model to be applied in society at large (Rosen 2013, 100). In other words, Foucault believes that "disciplinary procedures" are not limited to "enclosed institutions, but as centres of observation disseminated throughout society" (1995, 212). Lastly, they demonstrate that Ben-tham, himself, was skeptical that the "effects of internal-ization" would be the same "for all classes of society," which suggests that one's perception of surveillance is governed by his or her social position (Rosen 2013, 101). I, therefore, am interested in connecting what Rosen and Santesso say about the purpose of surveillance in litera-ture through the prism of what they label as "surveillance by coercion" and "surveillance by empathy": "In short: do you watch other people in order to understand them better, or do you watch them in the hope that by watch-ing them- you will successfully influence their behavior" (Rosen 2013, 87). I scrutinize how 'understanding' versus

'influencing' affects character agency. Foucault speculates that "oppressive measures... giv[e] rise to new forms of behavior," which implies that the mere assumption of surveillance alters a person's agency—his or her actions change according to the suspicion that someone is watching (Mills 2003, 33). The possibility of "new forms of behavior" is where I now turn the rest of my paper.

In *Home Fire*, Eammon is the son of the British Home Secretary: Karamat. His behavior, at the start of the novel, implies that he comes from a high-ranking British family, yet, as the novel progresses, so does his empathy. For instance, when he first meets Aneeka (his future love interest) he suggests that she lookup "news footage" about the "north circular canal bomb" (Shamsie 2017, 67). Aneeka ridicules Eammon's recommendation by saying to "GMW" is not a "good idea," which means "Googling While Muslim" (Shamsie 2017, 67). Eammon does do not realize that Aneeka's father was a terrorist, which is why she is not as eager as Eammon to look up this footage. This example, if used solely to examine Aneeka, seems to affirm Foucault's idea about a normalized citizen who internally corrects any suspicious behavior. She worries that someone might be watching her internet server, which is why she is extra cautious to not raise any red flags. Her familial background, more so than just the appearance of surveillance, dictates her paranoia. Eammon, by comparison, appears either indifferent or oblivious to a panoptic gaze. Their (mis)per-

ceptions about surveillance differentiate the two characters' interaction with material on the web. Ronald Kline and Trevor Pinch provide insight into this difference; they write, "SCOT [Social Construction of Technology] emphasizes the interpretative flexibility of an artifact. Different social groups associate different meanings with artifacts leading to interpretative flexibility appearing over the artifact. The same artifact can mean different things to different social groups of users" (Kline 1999, 113). Eammon and Aneeka's interaction with Google is polarized. Though both characters have the same access to the internet, their access is substantially different. Eammon has no reason to be overly concerned about surveillance; his father is the highest-ranking security official in the UK— not a former terrorist. He and Aneeka are from entirely different worlds.

This social discrepancy between the characters pushes against a Foucauldian panopticon because, as Galic et al. notes, Foucault neglects to account for Bentham's "chrestomathic- and constitutional-Panopticon;" which is to say, "social control moves beyond the margins of society... Non-marginalised people, thus, [are] beyond the panoptic gaze" (2017, 14). Eammon is not influenced by the fear of observation; instead, he is impervious to the anxiety of others. He, unlike Aneeka, is not marginalized which makes him unaware of the feeling that someone is always monitoring him. Aneeka, by comparison, cautiously uses the internet; her familial background gov-

erns the way she operates from day-to-day. David Lyon, perhaps the most preeminent surveillance theorist in contemporary studies, draws attention to how a person's use of "searchable databases" enable governments and companies the power to "monitor behavior, to influence persons and populations, and to anticipate and pre-empt risks" (2003, 14). He argues that either governments or corporations can construct an *imagined* narrative about someone by his or her "data double," (Marks 2015, 4; Haggerty and Ericson 2000, 611-16; Terranova 2015, 112) which suggests that governments monitor people's internet patterns so as to predict and prevent disaster. With respect to Eammon and Aneeka, she is more aware/ nervous that Googling certain images will, because of her background, raise suspicion. She, as a marginalized individual, more than Eamonn, is cautious about what her 'data double' means to an onlooker. Her familial history already raises a red flag, which prevents her from casually Googling images. Because he is not in the periphery, Eamonn does not self-restrict his usage. The divide between the two characters' use of the internet relates to their background. One's social position creates a binary: those conscious and concerned about surveillance versus those not concerned or aware of its presence.

Shaheen and others' essay on *Home Fire* states that "The peace-loving members of both the binaries like Eamonn and Aneeka (West/ Muslim), with their scope of complicating and questioning both the extremes of

'Us/Them: Terrorized/ Terrorist' binary, have no other fate left but to serve as the fodder to these extremes in this post-9/11 world" (2018, 164). This binary is why Aneeka is hailed into compliance (her "GMW" comment), and why Eammon is oblivious to this imposition. Some might argue that Aneeka is a special case because of her familial history of terrorism; however, it needs to be remembered that Aneeka merely states that Muslims must be careful while online. Arguably any person, regardless of religion or background, could raise red-flags if constantly Googling terrorist propaganda. Thus, does Eammon develop agency by his nonchalant attitude toward surveillance, which differs from Aneeka who fears one search? Karim H. Karim provides insight into how elite families internalize and shape the world, which they do by "drawing on the polarizing tendencies of myth to shape the public understanding of terrorism" (2010, 160). Because Eammon differs in class and familial background from Aneeka, he willingly views images of the bombing (Shamsie 2017, 67). Near the end of the novel, he realizes that many people cannot interact with the world as he does, which prompts him to challenge the very fabric of profiling and surveillance.

Before Eammon leaves England to comfort the grieving Aneeka in Pakistan (who is there mourning her brother's death, as well as the UK's refusal to let his body return to England), he creates an online propaganda video. His recording outlines how he met, fell in love with, and re-

grets his treatment of Aneeka; likewise, he criticizes the wrong assumptions about Aneeka that the British and his father believe (Shamsie 2017, 255-59). The video has the potential to create a new-consciousness in those who watch it online. To borrow two ideas/terms from Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, Eamonn creates "Flak," which means his video counters the image of Aneeka that the media fabricates (Shamsie 2017, 26-8). In the same vein, he negates the idea that the Pasha family is a common "enemy" (Shamsie 2017, 29-31), which is to say that the news, until this point, blasts harsh rhetoric about the Pashas. Eamonn uses his status as the Home Sectary's son to challenge the way Aneeka is represented. His video is brought to the forefront when someone decides to Google Aneeka's name. His visual blog impedes the spread of malicious articles, hashtags, and videos about Aneeka. His meditated action begs the question: does Eamonn's ability to counteract hateful articles give him agency, or does he lack agency because his visual response solidifies the power of the ads to influence his action of responding to their content? He holds cultural capital that he uses for influence, but what of those who lack the same privilege?

Parvaiz is the most paranoid of all the characters concerning surveillance. He utilizes his paranoia as a conduit to maneuver around his UK citizenship, which enables him to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) without detection. Under Foucault's panoptic principles,

Parvaiz's fear of being watched should have prevented him, or least raised suspicion for local authorities, from connecting with ISIS. This, as indicated, is not the case. To illustrate, upon discovering that his father was tortured as a suspected terrorist, Parvaiz goes online and "switche[s] the browser into private mode," so as to *feel* safe enough to Google "Bagram Abuse" (Shamsie 2017, 143). He needs to feel shielded from any unknown gaze before privately witnessing what his father endured. His delusion of persecution further manifests itself five-pages later when he is leery of looking at images of Iraq on a computer. Parvaiz refuses to examine their content until his mentor, Farooq, assures him that the images he is seeing are "offline" (Shamsie 2017, 148). His self-discipline, under the fear of potential onlookers, might suggest that his assimilation fits with Foucault's ideas of internalization, which would mean that his behavior will engender a positive outcome: compliance. Parvaiz, conversely, joins the ISIS media-unit. His actions, like being overly cautious about buying traceable smartphones admittedly, on the surface, gesture toward a Foucauldian reading. Yet, the question about personal power and agency complicates the matter. Does he have agency because his paranoia makes him self-regulate his behavior, or does he lack agency because his paranoia makes power exist? It is true that Foucault would say "it is the certainty of being punished... that discourages crime" (Mills 2003, 42). Instead, what if "the certainty of being punished" becomes the basis to commit a

crime? For example, Parvaiz's internalization of prosecution has the opposite effect— it makes him stealthier. He must maneuver without being seen by any authority. In his case, Parvaiz acts similarly to the aforementioned example of Mr. Ullah. He, so as not to draw suspicion from any onlooker, intentionally performs as a normal citizen. As stated in the introduction, Mr. Ullah does not wear a bomb vest outside his blue jacket because it will alert authorities to his intent. He, instead, hides his motive from surveillance's gaze, which is why the footage only tells a story after the fact. It is easy for one to trace his steps after his attack because one knows it will happen. A reductive application of Foucault's panopticon makes the reader believe, at first, that Parvaiz, much like Mr. Ullah, wants to avoid suspicion, which is why both men are cautious about their activity. By joining ISIS, however, Parvaiz ends up being a stereotypical inference of Muslim extremism. His decision tears asunder the very purpose of the appearance of surveillance; he only internalizes his self-discipline as a preventive measure to avoid being caught planning evil. His actions complicate the pressing question of this paper: is agency just a mirage in the overarching dynamic of power—is resistance 'written in'? Or, does power inadequately gauge the leverage one has to counter the way he or she is observed? Consequently, can performance thwart surveillance and suspicion, and do such productions change depending on what government one lives under? In order to flesh these questions out, I must examine the actions of a character who knows she is selectively under surveillance.

Aneeka, though mentioned earlier, must be further examined because her interaction with surveillance is the most suspect of all. Specifically, her actions question whether one can flip the panopticon on its head. As a case in point, after she and Eammon begin their tumultuous relationship, he asks her to join him on a summer holiday in either Tuscany or Bali. This request illuminates the difference between Aneeka's understanding of surveillance from Eammon's perception. She mentions that she cannot leave the country as easily as he can because MI5s are monitoring her behavior: "They listen in on my phone calls, they monitor my messages, my internet history. You think they'll think it's innocent if I board a plane to Bali with the home sectary's son?" (Shamsie 2017, 97). Unlike the majority of Muslims living in the UK, she is under observation because of her brother's decision to join ISIS. In response, Eammon demonstrates that he is unaware that Parvaiz joined ISIS; instead, he believes she is referencing her father's terrorist history— she tells him about Parvaiz. Here, there are two things worth noticing. First, the MI5s do not monitor her behavior until after Parvaiz joins ISIS, which they neither predicted nor prevented. Their delayed response, in turn, challenges the praxis of a panoptic 'disciplinary society.' Second, Aneeka is not under surveillance because of her actions; the British government observes her because of her brother's decision. She has done nothing to warrant suspicion (except being suspect by association). Parvaiz's decisions force her to self-disci-

pline: actions outside her control confounds why she must self-discipline. This incongruity prompts Aneeka to problematize and reverse the role of surveillance.

The book draws to a close with Aneeka challenging the power dynamic between what it means to be an observer versus what it means to be observed. Aneeka was always critical of the British Government; however, it is not until Parvaiz joins ISIS that she is forced to construct her own narrative— one that responds to her brother's choice. Under a Foucauldian ideology, Aneeka should have self-disciplined herself so as to show that she is not a radical like her brother. She, nonetheless, constructs her own counternarrative. After Eammon's father, Karamat (the Home Secretary), refuses to let Parvaiz's body return to England, after he died as a member of ISIS, Aneeka flies to Karachi, Pakistan, to recover his body. Before she flies to Pakistan her image is all over the news because of her brother, as well as her controversial relationship with Eammon. Her life has become a public spectacle, her phones are wire-tapped, and she is infamous on social media as "Aneeka 'knickers' Pasha" (Shamsie 2017, 214-5). Despite all these reasons to internalize and comply, she boldly walks into the airport and boards a plane symbolic of her resistance (Shamsie 2017, 218). TV cameras are present to capture the moment she reaches Parvaiz's body; live video of her mourning constantly loops in the UK, which she orchestrates for her own purpose. In Pakistan, people join in her mourning,

and even a local ice-vendor donates blocks of ice to preserve the body from the heat (2017, 241-2). This hospitality is aired throughout the UK, which calls into question how a 'view from above' is affected when a person intentionally challenges what it means to be observed. This suggests, at least by the end, that she is not a willfully hailed citizen who acts in accordance with social convention. Appearing British, in her case, fails to provide a reason for her compliance, which is why she antagonizes the framework and refuses its coercive tactics. Bill Ashcroft, in *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures*, mentions this concept: "One of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance is that of surveillance, because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies, and interpolated the colonized subject" (2017, 33). Aneeka, by making a spectacle of her situation on TV, pushes against the power of unrelenting state surveillance. She resists Karamat's faculty to surveillance by frustrating his positional power. Under normal circumstance he can use every sort of government surveillance to watch her; however, her appearance on live television prevents him from exercising authority. If Karamat were to use the available surveillance methods, then more people will sympathize with her. Similarly, he does not want to reveal the sheer extent of British surveillance. Being on TV, however, is not entirely the same as being watched by the state, which Aneeka knows and exploits. She corners one of the most pow-

erful governments in the world, which she does by making the observed the one who now observes. Aneeka interests herself with flipping the idea that surveillance is one-sided (the viewer and the one viewed), which she achieves by making a spectacle of her situation. In doing so, she turns the eyes away from her and back on her government. She twists the power dynamic by taking the reins back concerning her portrayal. This denotes that Aneeka's actions cause a fissure between the way she is meant to act versus the way she does act: her ability to manipulate her ascribed image gives her agency. Even though the British government previously monitored her "phone calls... messages... [and] internet history," they were not able to predict or subdue her mockery of their power (Shamsie 2017, 97). The government wants to subdue her deviant behaviors, but the larger audience wants to see how the administration will respond.

Aneeka's actions might align with what Galic et al. classify as Bentham's "constitutional-Panopticon," whereas it "is no longer the few watching the many but the many watching the few; citizens watching the governors" (2017, 14). Her rebellion places the public on her side versus their own government (Shamsie 2017, 241). Karamat stay away from the public spotlight; he hides in his office and home, which connects with the "chrestomathic-Panopticon," or, "the concept [that] constant visibility does not apply—the governors are monitored only in the course of their public duties, and they can

withdraw from the citizens' gaze when they want to rest or enjoy some privacy" (Galic et al. 2017, 14). Yet, Aneeka will not let him hide behind walls; she addresses him vicariously through his boss via satellite TV:

> In the stories of the wicked tyrants, men and women are punished with exile, bodies are kept from their families—their heads impaled on spikes, their corpses thrown into unmarked graves. All these things happen according the law, but not according to justice. I am here to ask for justice. I appeal to the prime minister: let me take my brother home. (Shamsie 2017, 237)

By not directly addressing Karamat, Aneeka undermines his authority over such a matter as her brother's body. She questions the very structure and inherent flaw of biased retribution. Karamat, though physically concealed from view as a "wicked tyrant," is now under public scrutiny. Reason, Aneeka asserts, is often the victim of prejudice. Her actions draw attention to the reality that the few construct restrictive categorizations of the many, which are then used to identify and codify people based on prejudices. Aneeka flips power on its head because she is conscious of the state surveillance; furthermore, she has control over the scope of government surveillance, as well as how the media portrays her. She, regardless of surveillance, refuses to act in a certain way, nor will she let herself be stuffed into a pre-fabricated narrative.

Until this point, I have only discussed common place or stereotypical surveillance methods as represented in *Home Fire*; however, I now turn my paper to a startling absence of favored governmental surveillance technology. Henceforth, I evaluate how both the US and British governments manipulate the way people perceive the use of this technology. To plainly state my point, I suggest that the tactical nature of drone surveillance is a red-herring. Specifically, I scrutinize the seemingly purposeful absence of drones in *Home Fire*, which creates a sharp turn in my paper that reverses the entire premise of power. Through an extended study on the use of surveillance drone technology, I suggest that power subverts itself.

Postcolonial authors, as a common motif, describe drones as a menacing and biased ever-watching eye in the sky, which might validate Foucault's assumption of authority: what is more panoptic than an unseen remote pilot? Are drones, I question, effective in predicting and preventing crime? Many drone scholars note that western nations use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to patrol and identify risks posed by 'irregular migrants,' both within and outside their territories (Csernatoni 2018, 175- 8, 191-3; Gregory 2011,189; Wall and Monahan 2011, 243-4; Wolff 2016; "BS-UAV"). Drones, therefore, are designed to identify and address potential national threats (Chamayou 2013, 41; Gregory 2011, 195; ROBORDER 2017, n.p), to differentiate between "normal" and "abnormal" behaviors (Chamayou 2013

43; Gregory 2011, 195), and to construct "virtual walls" (Csernatoni 2018, 177-8, 180) that protect borders. Such machines by default misinterpret the "complex challenges such as migration" (Csernatoni 2018, 180). For example, EU programs such as "FRONTEX [have] shown substandard results in preventing the staggering rise in nonsanctioned border crossings from 159,100 people detected in 2008 to 1,822,337 in 2016" (Csernatoni 2018, 177). One might assume that the rationale for drone surveillance is to protect national borders from an influx of migrants, which is true on the surface; however, this, I posit, is not the full story as demonstrated in literature.

UAVs rely on there being those who fear their gaze; paradoxically, resistance is contingent upon there being drones to hide from. To reiterate: "Where there is power, there is resistance… resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (History of Sexuality 1978, 95). However, Csernatoni complicates this point: "It is important to note that the real impact of such technologies on border and homeland security remains under question, especially in terms of their actual effectiveness and the supposedly increased security they are intended to provide" (2018, 177). She reports that there remains uncertainty about the true effectiveness of drones in preventing migration. Wall and Monahan subtly complicate this issue: "People who are aware of adversarial monitoring from the skies also engage in tactics to evade the drone stare.

Specifically, subjects of drone surveillance have tried to be stealthier and camouflage themselves better than they have in the past" (2011, 247). More importantly:

> there is the important and nagging reminder of the agency of the Other, who refuses to be petrified and immobilized by the drone stare, who exploits the technological hubris and vulnerabilities of the West, and who devises new tactics of camouflage and mobility to evade the reach of surveillance and violence from above. (Wall and Monahan 2011, 250)

Their observations make suspect Foucault's idea that resistance is written into power, which creates more questions concerning a drone's purpose. For instance, do governments actually acknowledge and fear the reality of the "agency of the Other?" In order to answer this question, I must unpack a different perception of drones' objective.

It is imperative that one understand governmental capital funded drone technology, which later allowed private corporations to capitalize on these innovations (Mackenzie and Wajcman 1999, 15). Csernatoni expands: "Due to their original design for military purposes… [their] initial creation was intended to attain certain hegemonic objectives in military terms" (2018, 178). Essentially, drones were originally created to establish national power and not to surveil migrants or those deemed a national threat. In *Home Fire*, however, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) are strange-

ly missing— drones are only mentioned twice, both of which are examples outside Britain. I suggest that Shamsie intentionally writes this limited view of drones as to draw attention to what is not inferred by western readers. The two cases describe drones as killing-machines outside UK borders. This lack of page-time, I forward, provokes the reality that governments, out of necessity, mask drone's purpose from view. If an object is out of view, then there remains no reason for one to question its use. To elaborate, Wall and Monahan note: "While drones appear to affirm the primacy of visual modalities of surveillance, their underlying rationalities are more nuanced and problematic" (2011, 240). They suggest that the appearance of drones might cause one to assume that such an object is strictly for surveillance; however, they say such a belief is misinformed. If drones mean only to surveil within national borders, then one must wonder why programs like "FRONTEX" have "almost double[d] and should reach 1,000 permanent staff by 2020... [and] Its budget should increase from 91.2M Euro in 2014 to 281.3M Euro in 2017" (Wolff 2016, n.p.). If drones merely surveille borders, then such expansion seems overkill. Instead, drones are meticulously crafted killing machines meant to distance the powerful from the other, which complicates the limited dearth of drones in Home Fire. I suggest that Shamsie writes-out drones so as to write-in their nonappearance, which normalizes their nonviolent nature within national borders. The minor characters demonstrate their lack of

knowledge concerning global warfare. Only Isma and an ISIS insurgents understand drones as a constant threat against survival in the East (Shamsie 2017, 173). Such military devices are not of daily importance in the West

Drones do not subtly make compliant citizen; instead, they force submission from those far away. Their power is a guard equipped with Hell Fire missiles. This reality is why I suggest that Shamsie only twice mentions drones from an other's perception. She subtly draws attention to the idea that people, when unfamiliar with an object, do not question its use outside their borders. In order to prevent questioning, governments disguise or hide drones as internal crime-fighting machines—such inquiries may expose the terrible reality of UAV technology. For length, I must only mention that scholars discuss the shortcomings of drone technology in identifying terrorists. They meticulous document the frightening data concerning 'generic' profiling, which has killed thousands of civilians (Chamayou 2013, 42, Gregory 2011, 200). The heart of this issue is that drone pilots are unable to clearly identify threats (combatant or civilian). This, therefore, is why those in power, as Shamsie portrays, must hide the truth: they fear public outrage. As such, governments, like the characters, manipulate society's observation of their behavior: they manipulate public gaze. Power flips upon itself— power lay with the people, which subverts traditional ideas of governmental power.

Karamat solely represents the British Government in *Home Fire*, yet his judgement is clouded by his position as a father and as the Home Secretary. For instance, when Eammon questions his lack of empathy for Aneeka, Karamat tells his son that "She had police protection stationed outside her house... [and] She hasn't been locked up in an interrogation room for fourteen days" (Shamsie 2017, 230). Karamat later reveals that the government cannot intervene in the situation because the people "have decided to embrace a woman who has stood up to a powerful government, and not just any powerful government but one that has very bad PR in the matter of Muslims" (Shamsie 2017, 241). This elucidates why a few pages earlier Karamat can only sit and watch Aneeka on his television. His observation of Aneeka is limited to what *public* cameras record, which gives a less informative picture than if were able to use whatever *governmental* means he has at his disposal. Instead, her "mobility" threatens his power over "sensory evidence" because she refuses to "relinquish as much of [her] absolute private autonomy as possible" (Rosen and Santesso 2013, 247). Karamat's authority is limited. He is unwilling to remind the public how drones are used outside national borders: he must maintain the façade of non-violent observation. The television cameras would only intensify the public's empathy for her if he sent drones to observe or kill her. Again, the extent of UAV bombings in Pakistan is well documented; however, Karamat cannot execute this order because the nations'

eyes are finally fixated on Pakistan's affairs. Heremains apathetic. Aneeka's agency tears the fabric of [t]his system apart; she challenges governmental surveillance by maneuvering around their methods of observation. In turn, her actions push against the idea that a person internalizes deviance for social acceptability. She is not a fearful/paranoid citizen. Karamat holds no power over her internal choice nor the public's rebuke of the system, which, in turn, leaves his political future questionable.

To borrow from Peter Singer once more, "if we all knew that we were, at any time, liable to be observed, our morals would be reformed...The mere suggestion that someone is watching encourage[s] greater honesty" (2011, 36). *Home Fire* questions if this is true. Parvaiz is extra cautious of observation, yet he manipulates how is viewed and joins ISIS. Aneeka, at first, because of her father's history, keeps a low profile so as not to draw suspicion; however, after Parvaiz dies she pushes against governmental surveillance. Similarly, Eammon's behavior exposes the many perspectives about surveillance that depend on one's background and position in society. Karamat's inability to change the actions of the characters, as a representation of the state, fractures Foucault's limited idea of surveillance: the many now watch the few. Perhaps Shamsie is suggesting that there are new theories about surveillance that are worthy of consideration—ones not directly linked with Foucault.

By way of summary and final application, I return to my opening example of Akayed Ullah and the step-by-step footage leading to the NYC subway bombing[1]. The images are a fascinating tapestry about the events leading up to the actual incident. Yet, the looming presences of surveillance did not dissuade Mr. Ullah from his actions. Rosen and Santesso note that the significance of these types of videos, or images, is often constructed after the incident occurs. This suggests that the ascribed narrative forces a person to only see Mr. Ullah and nothing else. If these were ordinary photographs, then one person may notice the woman with blue pants on

(Fig. 3 Crowd) Weiser/New York Times

the right side of the screen while someone else notices the man in the center looking at his cellphone (Fig. 3).

(Fig. 4 Detonation) Weiser/New York Times

Or, "To put it another way: just as the ethical crisis of the photograph makes possible the aesthetic experience of the viewer, so the neutrality of the video still displaces the ethical crisis of the image—over its proper interpretation— onto the viewer, disallowing a freer aesthetic response" (Rosen and Santesso 2013, 261). This means that an observer is unable to view an image as anything other than the ascribed meaning . My case and points, the reader, from the start of this essay, is guided to view thepictures via the specific story that I told about Akayed Ullah, which led the reader to ignore all the other facets of the four images. I guided the reader to watch Mr. Ullah's steps, which indicated would end with the explosion (Fig. 4). The stairwell, the other people, and the scenery are lost and irrelevant because they were not given the same importance as Mr. Ullah—the images only gained their notoriety because I suggested the special nature of the content. The community around

Mr. Ullah did not prevent his action because they could not predict his crime. The appearance ofsurveillance of little significance to anyone— including the man who does not self-discipline his perverse action. His deed is a meditated attack that "was scripted to the last detail but lacked an adequate readership" (Rosen and Santesso 2013, 12). After all, "the mere presence on CCTV cameras…and the knowledge that the videos from these cameras can be viewed by police" should curb crime (Mills 2003, 46). Therefore, does the observer have more agency than the observed? Is the observer's existence dependent on there being persons to observe? What if the observed manipulate what the observer views? Is an observer's power reliant on accurate observation? If so, is true power the ability to camouflage oneself, or are power and agency measured by one's ability to influence others to censor and hide themselves? What if one does not worry about observation? All of these questions appear as loose threads holding Foucault's panoptic society together. What happens when people begin to pull each string one by one? One wonders, therefore, does Mr. Ullah's agency come from his actions, or does his resistance allude to the fact that power is already allotted to President Trump— if the latter: what a dangerous world.

Notes:
1. To view all the videos, visit: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/05/nyregion/port-authority-bomber-trial.html

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Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Dalit Women's Life Narratives

Bhushan Sharma and Anurag Kumar

Introduction:

Dalit Literature is an articulation of unrepresented painful past of former 'untouchables' of the Indian subcontinent. They were kept outside the four Varnas of Hindu social order. 'Untouchables' is also called 'depressed classes' (Ambedkar), 'Harijans' (Gandhiji), 'Scheduled Castes' (Article 341, Indian Constitution) and 'Dalits'; the last being their self-chosen terminology. According to Zelliot, "Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution."

(1996: 268). According to Bhoite & Bhoite, "Dalit Sahitya (Literary) Movement is not purely a literary movement as it sounds to be; a deeper analysis reveals that it is basically a social movement" (1977: 74), for the liberation of Dalits and to bring about fundamental changes in the Indian social order.

Dalit Literature as a quest for identity and social equality mainly articulates the oppressed history of a community; documenting atrocities and discrimination done to Dalits by the hegemony of upper- caste people. But the developing Dalit literature had its own internal limitations. The gender question had either not been comprehended or kept excluded from the 'mainstream' Dalit literature. "Dalit women's issues did not have any place on the agenda of the Dalit movement and the Women's movement. Even today things have not changed." (Pawar 2015: 260). Seemingly Indian feminism has not broadened its perspective to encompass the concerns of dalit women who are 'Dalit of Dalits' (Manorma: 2008). Appropriately "[I]t is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences." (Lorde 1984: 122)

Hence the need was felt by women imbued with dalit consciousness, to represent their perspectives and lived experience. The central problem addressed in this article

is how dalit women made creative use of their marginality and the learning from their 'outsider-within' status. The current study illustrates the sociological significance of the select dalit women's life narratives.

Discussion and Analysis:

Dalit women have unique lived experience as this faction comprises of the intersectional oppressions of two groups oppressed on account of their birth: 'Dalits' and 'women'. Dalits in India are the 'depressed classes' (Ambedkar, 1936) and women 'the second sex' (Beauvoir, 1989). These doubly oppressed women are subjugated, downgraded, and marginalized. Hence the need to create a Dalit Feminist Standpoint was felt and traced by many researchers: Gopal Guru (1995), Sharmila Rege (1998), Chhaya Datar (1999). However, 'lived experience' of dalit women and their perspectives could be articulated accurately in their own writing.

The scrutiny of select texts: *Sangati*, *The Weave of My Life*, and *The Prisons We Broke* reveal the common aspect of the lives of their respective writers: Bama Faustina, Urmila Pawar, and Baby Kamble that they all certainly have a privileged standpoint as an 'outsider-within'. The study reflects their development from childhood to fully conscious grown-ups; their odyssey from a marginal space to the dominant social structures fetching them the epistemic benefit of the 'double vision' as a result

of bestriding both sides of a dichotomous social divide. This shaped their new perspectives on life. These narratives can be called 'social epiphanies' which made dalit women trail the ethics of black women writers: 'politicizing of their memory', 'remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present' (Hooks 1990: 147). The other commonality of dalit women writers is that they all have written their narratives in their regional languages and the visibility of these minor texts has been accredited to the political commitment of their translators. Maya Pandit has crossed many borders and very proficiently introduced the readers who are 'outsiders', to the nooks and corners of Indian Marathi region in her translations of the two original Marathi texts into English: Kamble's *Jina Aamcha* (1985) as *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) and Pawar's *Aaydan* (2003) as *The Weave of My Life: Dalit Women's Memoirs* (2008). *Sangati*, an English translation by Lakshmi Holmstrom of the second work of Bama, published in Tamil (1994) conveys the essence of the original text without sensationalizing its subject matter. As a result, what is from the margins in the regional language and culture has been brought into the vanguard of the international arena for the sake of bonding with similar cultural forces operating within other cultures. Thus like black women intellectuals the 'double vision' of dalit women writers helped them to understand that the privileged classes and the patriarchy use ideologies to restrict these women to the periphery, consequently limiting their access to societal resources

and institutions in order to control, define, and marginalize their location.

The term 'Outsider-within' was first coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1986). 'Outsider-within' status holder occupies a special space that their difference makes; they become different people, 'the other', 'marginalized' and vice-versa. It shapes the perspective of the experiencer which locates a unique standpoint. 'Outsider-within' status was captured by bell hooks, a black feminist critic while giving an account of her small- town, Kentucky childhood. She states, 'living as we did –on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out… we understood both' (1984: vii). Their difference makes them conscious of patterns or social constructions that may be beyond the comprehension or sight of sociological insiders. Therefore, the select narratives reveal some common themes.

Three Key Themes in Dalit Women's Life Narratives:

The lived experiences of dalit women are painful: "When drawing on bitter memories and writing about them, the tendency to reconstruct instead of resurrecting the past is inevitable" (Whitehead, 2009:126). Chandran and Hashim (2014) assert that in the process of reconstructing, writers may choose to restructure and present

events or experiences according to the importance that deems appropriate. Accordingly, the writers of the select texts while writing about the oppression and marginalization of dalit community develop a strong leaning towards feminist issues for the reason that gender with caste forms a lethal combination in the life of women. As a result consideration of the interlocking nature of caste, gender and class oppression is the foremost recurring theme in the select texts followed by the discussion on the endurance and resilience, and the role of women in the transformation of Dalit community.

Secondly, while living life as a dalit woman may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the multiplicity of class, age, religion and sexual orientation shaping individual dalit women's lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes. Therefore, collective themes which appear in their narratives may be experienced and expressed differently by different groups of dalit women. Finally, it may be undertaken that while Dalit Feminist Standpoint exists, its contours or outline may not be clear to dalit women themselves. Therefore, this paper would be an attempt to theorize the articulation of dalit women's lived experience that will elucidate the Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS) and documented experience of depressed women may reach a wider audience. The subsequent discussion of three key themes in select life narratives is itself a fragment of this emerging process of interpretation.

The Interlocking Nature of Oppression:

The texts illustrate that the marginality and social exclusion of Dalit community further pushed their women, being the second sex, into a state of repression, poverty, and ignorance. The interlocking nature of caste, class, and gender oppression of women is appropriately summarized by Bama:

> The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating. In the fields, they have to escape from upper-caste men's molestations. At church, they first lick the priest's shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husband's torment (2005: 35).

This shows dalit women suffer within the household, at the workplace, and in religious places. She is agonized physically, mentally, economically, and spiritually. The effect of caste on the women is closely related to their location within the Indian society. The select texts show that the caste system is most prevalent and stern in rural areas and elucidate power relations and the framework of intersectional oppressions of caste, gender, and class responsible for crippled existence of women. Their main struggle is for survival. "In the face of poverty, the girl

children cannot see the sense in schooling, and stayed at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies, and doing household chores" (Bama 2012: 79). Kamble states, "Our place was in the garbage pits outside the village, where everyone threw away their waste ….. We ate the leftovers without complaining and labored for others" (2008: 49). This shows the social exclusion and marginal spatial reality of Dalits. Majority of the women who belong to the repressed community work as food gatherers and are mostly dependent on natural resources for their survival. They collect fire wood, dry grass, wild fruits from forests, and variety of fish, crabs, and shells from the creeks. "The Weave portrays the conditions of a subhuman existence of an entire community, shamelessly exploited by the upper castes, reduced to a status of beasts of burden, extremely marginalized" (Pandit 2015: xvi). The text presents an authentic picture of dalit women's hardships:

> …women hunted for crawfish or crabs in the rocks by pushing their hands inside. They got drenched in the waves dashing against the rocks. Their hands and feet would be cut by the sharp edges of the rocks, and the salty seawater stung the wounds (Pawar 2015: 44).

These women are also compelled to undertake the dicey journey for their survival to sell their wares. Kamble's Aaji would also go with other women to fetch wood.

Once the big branches were cut and tied in small bundles, and being carried to the village for sale; the caste factor traversed their labor.

> They were not allowed to use the regular road that was used by the higher castes. When somebody from these castes walked from the opposite direction, the Mahars had to leave the road, descend down into the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the roadside. They had to cover themselves fully if they saw any man from the higher castes coming down the road, and when he came close they had to say, "The humble Mahar women fall at your feet". This was like a chant, which they had to repeat innumerable times, even to a small child if it belonged to a higher caste (Kamble 2008: 52)

Such utterances made them accept their subjugation and submission to the social hierarchy maintained on the foundation of religious ideology. These women could not pass without showing due respect to the upper-caste men, otherwise, they had to face the rage of their masters and elder male members of their family. Then the gathered firewood was mostly sold in the Brahmin lane. Every house in this lane had a platform of a chest height meant to prohibit the Mahar women from directly reaching the entrance. Instead, she would call out, "Kaki, firewood! The Mahar women are here with firewood." (Kamble 2008: 54). The kaki would then bargain with them. And finally, these women were asked to carry the

bundles to the courtyard of the house. They had to stack all the wood neatly after checking if any of their thread or hair was not left sticking to the wood that might pollute the lady's house.

Akin to the same principle of submission on the name of caste or religion, hegemonic gender ideology also made them accept the subservient position in marital relations.

> We believe that if a woman has her husband she has the whole world; if she does not have a husband, then the world holds nothing for her. It's another thing that these masters of kumkum generally bestow upon us nothing but grief and suffering. (Kamble 2008: 41)

The writers represent numerous cases of violence against dalit women: "At the slightest pretext, the husband showered blows and kicks on her. Sometimes he even whipped her." (Pawar 2015: 112-113); "He would beat me up for flimsy reason… In fact, this was the life most women led" (Kamble 2008: 155); '… the poor women would take her children and cross the hills and valleys at night, her face broken, body swollen, bleeding and aching all over, and reach her mother's house" (Pawar 2015: 33). Therefore, a dalit woman is only a subservient partner in marital relation, only an object of lust fulfillment, and an unpaid servant.

Bama's *Sangati* is an illustration of how patriarchy works in the case of dalit women. The foremost question is of economic inequality. Women presented in Sangati are wage earners working as agricultural and building-site laborers, but earning less than men do. Yet the money that men earn is their own to spend as they please, whereas women bear the financial burden of running the family, often single. They are also constantly vulnerable to abuse in the world of work. Hard labor and economic precariousness lead to a culture of violence and this is the theme that Bama explores boldly throughout the book. Bama also exposes the atrocities and sexual exploitations of Dalit women who work as farm laborers for the upper caste landlords. The whole account of Mariamma in *Sangati* validates the inhuman treatment given to poor dalit girls. She fell into the well while working and had been almost crippled, she suffered from malnutrition, a landlord attempted to rape her. But gender and caste politics proved her the perpetrator for which she is made to pay a fine of rupees two hundred. In Dalit community '[I]t's one justice for men and quite another for women' (Bama 2005: 24). Mariamma is then scolded by the *naattaamai* , "The landowners get up to all sorts of evil in the fields. Can we bring them to justice? ... After all, we have to go crawling to them tomorrow and beg for work" (Bama 2005: 25). Thus social relegation of Dalits leads to their powerlessness in protecting their women from the sexual exploitation by upper-caste men. Therefore,

these women suffer the double patriarchal oppression one from the men of their own community and second from the upper caste men. Thus patriarchy as a system is not free from caste.

The study of texts also shows the violent treatment of women by fathers, brothers, and husbands. Bama writes that within the community the power rests with men: caste courts and churches are male-led and rules for sexual behavior are very different for men and women (2005). Kamble's text, *The Prisons*, illustrates that dalit men did not hesitate in chopping off the nose of their women who failed to abide by the patriarchal norms. She also discusses the horrible social practices of *Devdasis* and *Muralis*. In the former practice young dalit girls are married to gods or goddesses and in the later, the traditional Mahars used to dedicate their girls to God *Khandoba* as *Muralis*.

Pawar also represents the enforcement of archaic and unjust gender rules of caste panchayats and shares the case of a widow who was found to be pregnant. The whole village knew who the man was. But only she was subjected to the verdict.

> She was made to lean forward, and women kicked her from behind till the child was aborted. The villagers felt this was a valiant act of bravery. They felt proud that they had protected the village's honor. If a

woman was suspected to have erred, she was brought before the Panchayat for justice and punishment. She was publically judged and her other relatives would beat her up as well (Pawar 2015: 156).

Therefore, the narratives of dalit women reject the claims made by both the non-dalit feminists and dalit male intellectuals such as patriarchy differs for dalit women; that it generates less intense patriarchal oppression (Ilaiah, 1996), or that domestic violence can be resisted by dalit women (Dietrich, 2003). The interlocking nature of oppression is so exasperating that dalit women are many a time possessed by the spirits and Bama explores the psychological stress and strains to be the possible reason for dalit women's belief in their being possessed by spirits or *peys*.

In fact, children become aware of prejudices at an early age. Gender discrimination begins from birth. It is a must for a woman to beget a boy. Besides a baby boy is given more attention, care and is fed longer. Boys are given more support, liberty, and respect than girls. Gender bias which begins from the birth of girls continues throughout life for all women including progressive women. If she wants to pursue education or go for a job the condition is attached that she could do anything but only after finishing daily chores in the house. In addition, the community has an exploitative culture for working women to hand over their salary to their husbands. It

was like "deliberately offering your head for butcher's knife" (Pawar 2015: 208). Gender discrimination is further seen in working women at the time of promotion. "The moment a man is promoted; he immediately becomes a *Bhau saheb*. But women can never earn the title of *Saheb* . After their promotions, they remain '*bai* , without the '*Saheb*' (Pawar 2015: 235). Therefore, many social practices far from being neutral are in fact gendered which sustains a patriarchal social order. And the problems are compounded by considerations of caste.

The practice of untouchability is imposed on Dalits by birth as caste is ontological and dictates their fate of repression and marginalization in caste centered Indian social structure. In fact, children become aware of caste bias naturally without anybody telling them. Many dalit writers have memories of a difficult childhood, starvation, repression, and social exclusion. Pawar still has the colonial imprints in her memories. *Aaye* sent Urmila to deliver baskets to her customers who never allowed her to enter their house and made her stand at the threshold. They sprinkled water on the baskets to wash away the pollution. To avoid contact with her they would drop coins in her hand from above. She also remembers her accounts with Pandit family to whom her Aaye would send her off with a couple of paisa coins to buy some pickle from them. She was not allowed to go beyond the first step of Pandit's house.

> Kaku would bring some fiery red pickle on a plantain leaf, the lime pieces covered with yellow rai dal and oil, and keep it on the second or third step. Then I kept my coins on a step, which the Kaku collected, but only after she had sprinkled water on them to cleanse them of pollution. (Pawar 2015: 78)

Many women lack awareness about themselves and their oppression. Women's powerlessness comes from the real concrete circumstances of exploitation. They are oppressed politically, and have no say in the community; exploited economically, "… men received one wage, women another, they always paid men more" (Bama 2008: 54); suffered physical and sexual violence, silence and impunity. For women, service to others and biological reproduction is their prime duty. Biological reproduction continues until their menopause. Kamble gave birth to eleven children of whom three died during childhood. She describes the traumatic and life-threatening conditions in which women give birth to children:

> The ignorant midwives would keep thrusting their hands into the poor girl's vagina to see how far the baby had progressed. Invariably, the vagina would get swollen, obstructing the baby's path… It was battle with death. (Kamble 2008: 58)

This indicates that the women who produce the labor force themselves labor at the cost of their life. They lack basic facilities and for the want of cotton or cloth

pads, they continue to bleed. Many a time they suffer the pangs of hunger.

> After the baby comes out into the world, a terrible void is left inside. The stomach needs soft and light food. But from where could Mahars get such food? With the hunger gnawing her insides, the poor woman would just tie up her stomach tightly and lie down on rags, her body a mass of aches and pain. (Kamble 2008: 57)

As they have nothing to eat many women risk their lives during childbirth. Infants die as well. These women offer their whole lives to the service of mother earth. But they are helpless when they themselves become mothers.

Endurance and Resilience:

Despite the pain and sufferings that dalit women experience, there exists within them, the motivation to persevere. Bama asserts, "Our women have an abundant will to survive however they might have to struggle for their last breath. Knowingly or unknowingly, we find ways of coping in the best ways we can" (2005: 68). Some women endure the sufferings patiently and many show perseverance and continue with the duties that they are obliged to perform. Others resist and find a new meaning to their existence. Bama chose the path of education and remaining single: "In this way, because of my education alone, I managed to survive among those who

spoke the language of caste difference and discrimination" (2012: 22). Baby Kamble worked with her husband in their department store and managed to spare time for reading and writing. Pawar grew with each experience and turned out to be a hard-core feminist. She came to understand more about rationalism, humanism, scientific thinking, and the distinction between suffering born out of natural causes and those caused by man-made artificial factors such as hierarchical relations.

> I felt that a woman was also an individual. If a man has muscle power, a woman has the power to give birth. These are distinctly different capacities and need to be evaluated differently, not in the same way…I had realized that I now had a new vision, a new perspective of looking at women. I had lost my fear. (Kamble 2008: 248)

Therefore these narratives talk about the differences between women, their varied needs, the different ways in which they are subject to oppression and their coping strategies. The older generation had their own ways of overcoming oppression and distress. Aaye, mother of Pawar suffered from the curse of caste, illiteracy, and poverty. She became a widow at a young age and lost her son. But this pain made her tough to take a stand and rebuild her life. She earned by weaving cane baskets, became combative, arguing with the customers, abusing and thrashing her children if they missed school.

Bama Faustina is a rare example of dalit women's endurance and resilience. Bama's writing of Karukku was more of an outpouring of all her experiences than a literary act. She rejected all the colonial imprints embodied in memories. Pouring out all negative emotions was like 'catharsis.' She healed herself and felt like "a falcon that treads the air, high in the skies" (Bama 2012: xi).

Bama's *Sangati*, her second novel, teases out a positive cultural identity as Dalit and women which can resist upper-caste and upper-class norms, it's also a glimpse to a part of the lives of those "Dalit women who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them. And through this, they found the courage to revolt" (Bama 2005: vii). It also shows their liveliness and the will to bounce back. Set against the narratives of hardships are the accounts of reinforcing cultural events: 'coming-of-age ceremony,' a 'betrothal where gifts are made by the groom to the bride', 'a group wedding of five couples at church,' (Bama 2005: 76). Kamble writes in detail about their favourite month of *Ashadh*, a month of ritual baths, house cleaning, comfort, and sweet food: "This one month of happiness developed in their hearts an iron will to endure whatever suffering came their way during the remaining eleven months" (Kamble 2008: 12). Other reviving facets in common women's life can be seen in their female bonding and everyday happenings; their working together, preparing and eating food, washing, bathing, and swimming or celebrating. Singing was their main joyous activity. 'They sang all the time at

work, too, so that the woods rang out to the sound of their laughter as they made up songs and words to tease each other' (Bama, 2005: 76).

> Handsome man, dark as a crow
> More handsome than a blackened pot
> I have given you my promise
> You who can read Ingilissu (Bama 2005: 77).

The reference in the last line is to the prospective bridegroom had been to school and could read English. So the bride could learn little English, a matter of pride for these women. Here's another song about a man who took a mistress after he got married:

> Eighteen sweet paniyaaram
> You handed to her, across the wall
> But whatever you might give away
> You still are my husband (Bama 2005: 77).

The women always sang songs and laughed like this, while weeding, transplanting rice, harvesting etc. Their habitual act of lampooning and joking finally gives them the strength to stand up courageously against caste oppression.

Role in Transformation of the Community:

Dalit women perform the reproductive labor for their community. They are the force behind the survival and

struggle of the oppressed community. The analysis of select texts reveals that the women not only form the household but are responsible for running the family often single as man's earnings are used for himself whereas woman works for her family. Dalit women have emerged as the agents of transformation in the community. They forwarded the Dalit literary movement by contributing intellectually, by representing their perspectives on various issues of their community, and womenfolk. Bama in an interview with Manoj Nair (2001) says, "…I could not build a monument; I could not build a sculpture. I wrote a book. My community thus found a place in the mainstream media" (outlookindia.com). Their writings generated dalit consciousness and inculcate the impulse for resistance in future generations. Kamble states in 'Introduction' to *The Prisons We Broke*:

> I am writing this history for my sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and my grandchildren to show them how the community suffered because of the chains of slavery and so that they realize what ordeals of fire the Mahars have passed through. I also want to show them what the great soul Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar single-handedly achieved which no one else had achieved in ages (Kamble 2008: xiv).

Kamble is a veteran of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra. Inspired by the radical leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, she has been involved with the struggle from a very young age. She has established a residen-

tial school for socially backward students in Nimbure, a small village near Phaltan, Maharashtra. Her autobiography also brings to the forefront the tremendous transformative potential of the oppressed people to change the world. Kamble writes Dr. B.R Ambedkar, the torchbearer of Dalit movement, taught the depressed classes, "You don't worship God; you worship your ignorance. Generations after generations Mahars have ruined themselves with such superstitions." He asked them to follow the path of educating their children and abandon god. Ambedkar's speech was attended by a huge crowd including women. Kamble's Aaji also made a resonating speech. (Kamble 2012: 65). Many women became determined to sacrifice anything for their children's education. Pawar's mother also worked hard for her children's education. On the one hand, she would abuse and thrash her children if they missed school, and on the other, she would confront the school teacher for his caste bias: "Look, I am a widow; my life is ruined. Yet I sit here, under this tree and work. Why? Because I want education for my children so that their future will be better" (Pawar 2015: 69).

Pawar, a long term member of the Dalit and Women's movement offers a cogent critique of feminist and dalit politics in her writings. She along with other members founded 'Dalit Women's Organization' (Pawar 2015: 267) and her idea of 'Samwadini Dalit Stree Sahitya Manch' was brought to reality by her companion Eleanor Zel-

liot. (Pawar 2015: 275). Pawar along with Meenakshi Moon also wrote the contemporary classic *We Also Made History* to record the contribution of women to their community and Dalit movement.

Bama enlightens the people about the repressive nature of all religions and the Catholic Church in particular. She brings forth that the church is made of priests and nuns who are from upper castes, and 'control the dispossessed and the poor by thrusting a blind belief and devotion upon them, and turning them into slaves in the name of God, while they themselves live in comfort' (Bama 2012:108). She believes that only education can transform society. She also admires and applauds the ideals of 'courage, fearless, independence, and self-esteem.' (Bama, 2005, xx) in dalit women and not the traditional Tamil 'feminine' ideals of accham (fear), naanam (shyness), madam (simplicity, innocence), payirppu (modesty).

Conclusion:

The learning derived from the 'outsider-within' status of dalit women writers proves a real site of epistemic reformulation, and new understandings about the hierarchy of caste-based Indian social structure which suppress, repress and marginalize Dalits, and their women who are also the easy targets of hegemonic gender ideology. The standpoint of the writers substantiates the truth that

many social practices are not neutral but gender-based which maintain and propagate a patriarchal social order, relations of power that systematically privilege men, and detriment, disempower and objectify women as a social group. Dalit women's sexuality is exploited to maintain caste. They are doubly ensnared in patriarchal societies; one from the men of their own community and another from upper-caste men. Caste councils and caste panchayats try to enforce their archaic and unjust gender rules over them to protect the community identity. And upper caste men are granted impunity for their crimes committed against these women.

Dalit communities also remain burdened with social evils of superstitions, ignorance, drunkenness, harassment, and humiliation of bride in the hands of the in-laws under the guise of religion, culture, and ideology. Dalit women endure the interlocking oppressions of caste, class, and gender. Despite all the adverse factors these women have shown endurance and resilience. They have equally contributed to the family, labor, economy, caste struggles and Dalit movement, and Dalit Literature.

Therefore, the study concludes that the narratives of dalit women are not 'sob stories' but testimonies; voices against injustice that challenge the social order and provide productive starting points for enquiry into questions about not only those who are politically and socially suppressed and muted, but also those who because of

the same social and political system, subjugate others. This study may also benefit other marginalized sections or sociologists by putting greater trust in the creative potential of their own narratives and cultural biographies.

Notes:

1. The Hindu social order; according to the holy texts, consists of four-fold Varna division in the society, 'The highest is that of the Brahmans or priests, below them the Kshatriyas or warriors, then the Vaishyas, in modern usage mainly merchants, and finally the Shudras, the servants or have- nots….There is in actual fact a fifth category, the untouchables, who are left outside the classification' (Dumonts, 1999, 66-67). So these were 'outcasts' who were described as impure and relegated to the rank of those who should not be touched, in other words, "Untouchables". They performed menial and impure jobs.

2. Grandmother

3. The name of an Atishudra (Dalit) caste

4. Paternal aunt; also a respectful way of addressing elder women.

5. The headman of the paraiya (Dalit) community

6. Brother

7. Sir, master —used especially among the native inhabitants of colonial India

8. A polite form of address for women.

9. Mother

10. "...[t]he labor needed to sustain the productive labor force. Such work includes household chores; the care of elderly, adults, and youth; the socialization of children; and the maintenance of social ties in the family." (61). See Parrenas, Rhacel Salazar. "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor." *Gender and Society* 14, no. 4 (2000): 560–580

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A Tale of Two Siti's: Parallel Representations of Foreign Domestic Helpers in their own Poetry and in Singapore Society

Paul Woods

Introduction

Within a neo-colonial, and exploitative migrant labour framework, foreign domestic workers (FDWs) are represented in Singapore by a mixture of government policy and their portrayal in the press, individual blogs, and on the websites of 'maid agencies'. Through the Migrant Worker Poetry Competition, Filipino and Indonesian domestic helpers working in Singapore show their creativity, feelings, and connection with home. The

subaltern speaks through her poems, as she challenges her depiction in the Singapore mainstream. Although some mention suffering and deprivation, the overall picture is one of willing self-sacrifice and strength.

'Siti' is a common name among Indonesian women, which I use to symbolise FDWs from both countries. The Siti of domestic worker poetry is different from the Siti constructed by the Singapore mainstream. Also, Singapore is two cities, one a global metropolis dominated by a meritocratic, Chinese success culture and the other a 'below-stairs' space inhabited by poorly paid, effectively invisible foreign women.

Singapore has been independent for around half a century. Its rise as a financial, manufacturing, and educational hub, its labour laws and practices, and forces of globalisation have created a neo-colonial binary between nation and imported labour.

Neo-Colonial Singapore

In her discussion of colonialism and post-colonialism, Loomba (1998, 47) summarises Said's (1978) *Orientalism* in the following manner: Colonialism divided East and West into 'us and them'; westerners were portrayed as rational and civilised, hard-working and forward-looking, while non-westerners were seen as irrational and barbaric, lazy and caught in tradition. Europe was conceptualised as

masculine and the Orient as feminine (Carr 1985), to be cared for and protected, but also penetrated and exploited.

While the individual was celebrated at the Metropole, the colonised were grouped together according to simple essentialisms (Loomba 1998, 54). Portraying people 'as all the same' allows the self to keep the other (actually plural and diverse) at a distance, especially if the center feared that racial mixing would imperil their purity and power. Colonialism saw complex interactions between race, gender, and class (Rajan and Park 2005, 54), an intersectionality which persists, as the colonial abuse of women as plantation labour has given way to modern sweatshops and domestic service. Under globalised, neo-liberal economics, governance has changed but exploitation is the principal characteristic of the postcolonial era (Rajan and Park 2005). People are elements in the production process, and 'colonisation = "thingification"' (Cesaire 1972, 21) or 'commodification' (Woods 2015) is an equation that still rings true. Exploitation is the result of power flowing not only from top to bottom but also in a 'capillary fashion' (Foucault, quoted in Loomba 1998, 50); unskilled workers in Singapore are at the end of the finest filaments of a power dynamic. Exploitative power flows around every aspect of these workers' lives and there is nothing they can do to liberate themselves from it. It is 'all pervasive' (Loomba 1998, 50). In addition, the neo-colonial status of unskilled workers in Singapore brings the nuance

that 'metropole' and 'colony' occupy the same physical space. Loomba's criticism of Said for neglecting the 'self representation of the colonised' and the resistance to colonisation from below (1998, 49) is pertinent when considering the self-representation of domestic helpers. The poems written by domestic workers not only constitute an alternative to the way in which they are represented in the Singapore mainstream, but also resist neo-colonial attitudes and reveal a sense of agency.

Government Policy on Domestic Helpers

Singapore relies on foreign labour in its manufacturing industry, service sector, infrastructure development, and even family life. The categorisation of the roughly one million foreigners employed in the island republic (Yap 2014) as 'workers' and 'talent', reflects the 'bifurcation' of foreign labour (Yeoh 2005). Unskilled or semi-skilled 'workers' come from poorer neighbouring countries, while highly skilled 'talent' often hails from the West and Northeast Asia (Yeoh and Lin 2012).

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) classifies domestic helpers under the lowest class of 'Work Permit', which lasts for two years. Foreign workers may not bring family members, marry Singapore citizens (Yeoh and Lin 2012), or become pregnant (Yap 2014, 231). They must leave the country when their contract ends (Yap 2014, 224). This is a 'use and discard' approach to foreign la-

bour (Yeoh 2005). In December 2016 there were 240000 FDWs, mostly from Indonesia and the Philippines and all living at their employer's residence. They live and work at the intersection (Crenshaw 1989) of nationality, gender, status, rural origin, and locatedness, caused by the income disparity between Singapore and its neighbours.

Because FDWs have neither job descriptions nor fixed working hours they 'are not real workers' (Anggraeni 2006, 104), echoing the colonial conceptualisation of the 'national' and 'international' as masculine and 'household' and 'body' as feminine (Silvey 2006). This reflects a binarism in which male labour was considered 'larger' and female labour 'smaller' (Silvey 2006, 67) such that women and their work were trivialised and considered unimportant. Although FDWs have neither clear job descriptions nor fixed working hours, the legal frameworks governing their employment as foreigners suggest that they are not part of an informal economy. Indeed their lack of protection within a highly centralised and formalised labour system reveals the strongly neo-colonial power dynamic at work.

The Domestic Helper Experience

Regional income disparity is a push-pull factor in a complex migration system (Castles and Miller 2009) providing cheap labour and facilitating remittances to poorer countries. Many women seek employment in Singapore to help

meet education costs of family members; others need money for loans or health care expenses (Maid to order 2005, 13). Well-qualified Filipina women end up as FDWs to support poor parents (Swept under the rug 2006, 67).

Homesickness is the main problem for one quarter of domestic helpers on arrival in Singapore. One tenth feel unable to cope with their work and a similar number are stressed in a new environment (FDW and FDW Employer Study 2010, 16). Many FDWs claim to work between 13 and 19 hours per day and feel treated 'like machines' (Maid to order 2005, 61, 66).

Maid to order gives accounts of FDWs falling from high buildings when working and even committing suicide due to overwork, verbal or physical abuse, pressure over debt or threats of repatriation, or being forbidden to leave the employer's residence or communicate with family and friends (2005, 39).

Employers sometimes confiscate FDWs' telephone numbers and contact addresses and forbid them to use mobile phones, or contact neighbours or other domestic helpers (Maid to order 2005, 42). Some employers believe FDWs incapable of making good choices about friends (of both sexes), managing money, or other areas of adult life. This 'control and confine' approach (Swept under the rug 2006, 73) 'infantilizes grown women' (Maid to order 2005, 43), seeing

them as 'stupid, unskilled and worse still, so recalcitrant that they are untrainable' (Anggraeni 2006, 204).

Physical and sexual violence, and personal, gender-based, and ethnic abuse are common (Maid to order). Concerning sexual abuse, one Indonesian FDW asked, 'Why do domestic workers always have to submit'? (Swept under the rug 2006, 17). If domestic service represents feminisation, such abuse of the body signals the most extreme essentialisation of all.

Some FDWs have to eat leftovers, are given inadequate food, or are deprived of food as punishment (Maid to order 2005, 79ff). Many do not have their own place to sleep (Tay 2016, 9), sharing rooms with their employer's children and even adult men, causing lack of sleep and stress.

Domestic helpers describe their work as repetitive 'drudgery' (Thomas and Lim 2010, 5) and when they cannot socialise with friends, human needs such as friendship and affection are unfulfilled (Tay 2016, 17). Some engage in 'transnational mothering' (Platt et al. 2014, 15), even making sure that their children's homework is done.

The Representation of FDWs in Singapore Society

FDWs are represented in several overlapping sources, a discourse formation of 'language and practice' (Hall

2013, 29). This section looks at government guidelines for employers, articles in the Singapore press, websites of private maid agencies, and a small number of blogs.

Government Guidelines for Employers

The MOM provides advice for FDWs and employers in cartoon style leaflets, in which the employer is always female and of a lighter skin tone than her employee. In a country where no one wears shoes in the house, the domestic helper is portrayed as barefoot, even when outside, while the female employer wears black court shoes, a symbol of power and authority ("Handy guide" n.d.). In a neo-colonial binary a white male master has been replaced by a non-Caucasian female.

'Your guide to employing a foreign domestic worker' reminds employers that FDWs may lack English skills, fail to meet cleanliness expectations, 'need constant supervision and coaching', struggle to adjust to Singapore, and 'have different way of life, beliefs and customs' ("Your guide" n.d., 5). On their rest day, FDWs should not throw litter or spit, 'talk loudly in public', and must 'avoid places with high traffic flow'. They are 'strongly encouraged to take part in constructive and meaningful activities' ("Handy guide" n.d., 8). The loss of agency and simplicity of mind implied evoke a neo-colonial feminisation.

Regulations prohibiting marriage to people in Singapore and requiring six-monthly medical exam-

inations 'codify stereotypes that…domestic workers…[are]… promiscuous' (Maid to order 2005, 91) and echo colonial-era fear of the ethnic other.

Newspapers

Singapore's Straits Times and The New Paper contain numerous articles about domestic helpers, which fall into three broad categories. The first is legislation and policy related. The second category exposes criminal or unethical behaviour by employers and the punishments given. The final group details illegal or inappropriate activities by the FDWs, such as abuse of people in their care, theft and damage, and illicit sexual activity. As policy has been covered, this section looks at the second and third categories. The following are relevant headlines from *The Straits Times* and *The New Paper* in the last quarter of 2017 and the first of 2018:

Woman jailed for hitting maid with plastic hanger (Alkhatib 2017a)

Maid jailed for pouring hot oil on employer's teenage son (Chong 2017)

Punggol couple claim trial over maid abuse (Alkhatib 2018a)

Couple accused of abusing maid allegedly made her pour hot water on herself (Alkhatib 2018b)

Maid jailed for false rape claim after sex with 70-year-old (Alkhatib 2018c)

Maid jailed for stealing $5k in red packets from 90-year-old employer (Chong 2018)

Maid jailed for eight months for hurting elderly woman with a mild form of Alzheimer's disease (Alkhatib 2018d)

Getting tougher on maid abusers (Alkhatib 2018e)

Maid jailed 8 months for pinching grandma, poking her eye (Alkhatib 2018f)

These headlines were found by searching on the websites of the two newspapers. The articles referred to are either accounts of events in which the FDWs were involved or reports on legal cases in process, presentations of facts with no commentary or opinion. The articles provide a simple representation, which 'works as much through what is not shown, as through what is' (Hall 2013, 43). The only positive mentions of the women relate to their functionality as domestic helpers. They are either a threat or a liability, without normal emotions, aspirations, or struggles, stereotyped into an otherness convenient for the dominant mainstream. We are given a neo-colonial, essentialised and selective construction of those far from the 'metropole'.

Maid Agencies

This section looks at the representation of domestic helpers on the websites of so-called 'maid agencies'. In 'Eight simple ways to make your children fall in love with your maids', the company " Searchmaid" claims that many people do not show respect to domestic helpers and treat them inappropriately in front of children. Maids are treated like slaves, 'very low graded human[s]' (Simple ways n.d., n.p.).

According to Finesse Living, employers must ensure that the maid has sufficient rest. 'Common maid problem' are stubbornness, 'bad disposition and table manner, poor personal hygiene'. Employers are urged to 'set a good example is for the maid to emulate'. Also, employers should 'never give multiple or complex instructions' (Common maid problems n.d., n.p.).

United Channel comments on national characteristics. 'Filipino maids can handle more complicated tasks compared to helpers from other countries' while Myanmar women are 'less demanding' and 'known to be sweet in nature and have a positive outlook in life'. Indonesians are 'hard-working, well-behaved and easy-going'. Unfortunately, they may be unfamiliar with urban living (Maid expectations n.d., n.p.)

Another Finesse Living article notes that some FDWs do not 'come from urban dwellings' and may not be familiar with 'modern gadgets and electronic equipment'. It is important that employers 'show by example, practice the use of the gadget or equipment repeatedly'. Employers are urged to be patient and 'never expect them to understand you immediately'. Maids should be allowed to call friends and family, as long as this is not excessive (New maid n.d., n.p.).

Eden Grace Maids Filipino domestic helpers are relational, concerned for those in their care, and 'good in motor skills' [sic]. FDWs from Northern Luzon are known for 'being hard-working and thrifty' while those from the Western Visayas have 'a reputation of being gentle and submissive' (Filipino maids n.d., n.p.). Raymond Maids describe their Indonesian domestic helpers as 'obedient, hard-working, and humble' (Indonesian maids n.d., n.p.) and Myanmar maids as 'humble, hard-working, and patient' (Myanmar maids n.d., n.p.).

Choosing and retaining a good FDW is important because of the 'numerous news coverage of Singapore maids gone bad!' (Selecting and keeping n.d., n.p.). United Channel's advice on managing a maid 'without being nasty' reminds employers that FDWs find it difficult to settle. Employers should show the domestic helper that she is 'part of the family' and remind her that 'her sacrifices are worth it for her family back home' (Manage maid n.d., n.p.).

Eden Grace Maids asks employers to show understanding because settling in and homesickness can cause FDWs to lack focus in their work. Domestic helpers 'in general are non-confrontational' and thus might 'either deny or give excuses', so employers should avoid criticisms such as 'you are stupid or you are not a good helper'. Eden Grace also asks that FDWs be treated as family members, because 'by nature, they are warm and hospitable' (Tips for employers n.d., n.p.).

Advising employers to be patient and caring may result from human rights reports and unfortunate stories in the press. Less positive is the representation of domestic helpers as 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1977), humble, submissive, and overwhelmed by Singapore's urban environment; there is more than a hint of essentialisation and orientalism here.

Blogs

While government publications seek the good of employer and employee and private agencies aim to recruit good FDWs for responsible homes, bloggers have no constraints. Blogs that I visited either advocate better treatment of domestic helpers or serve as fora for people to complain.

In 'Maid abuse: Singapore's shame', Tan discusses maltreatment of domestic helpers. On a visit to a maid agency, she overheard the owner telling dissatisfied em-

ployers, 'if you don't like the maid, just bring her back' (Lucky Tan 2009, n.p.), a commodification which makes a woman no different from a defective microwave or tin opener. Tan also mentions negative stereotyping caused by 'dramatised juicy stories…about maids bringing men to the house or maids having boyfriends outside'. This posting is followed by 41 comments discussing government policy or experiences with domestic helpers. Seven posts portrayed FDWs negatively while one positive comment concerned an Indonesian woman who aspired to be a teacher. Two posts advocated sending maids back 'if you're not happy with them'. Another person suggested beating up the FDW as a means of stress relief. A follow-up posting to the story of a maid who was almost starved to death joked that the employer's family had done her a favour by helping her lose weight. Another posting said that maids are treated like slaves. FDWs are described as dishonest and inept and liars and thieves.

Another blog records 'life as a Singapore domestic maid's employer' (Winter 2009, n.p.). FDWs are described as 'spongers, lacking guilt, and feeling entitled to everything' they are given. Winter is scathing of maids who apparently do not write down her instructions because they are lazy or unwilling to do things the way she wishes. She asks domestic helpers why they have low status jobs and then blame their employers. For Winter, FDWs are immature and schemers, unwilling to face the consequences of their actions. Winter castigates 'modern maids' for coming to Singapore to 'earn high salary, get plenty en-

joyment, find boyfriends and asking for little workload'. In other postings domestic helpers tell lies, are 'big headed' and spend time 'chit chatting' instead of looking after children; they are slippery and underhanded. One says in capital letters, 'even the nicest maid can turn against you'. A non-Singaporean points out that FDWs are treated like cattle and make a contribution to the nation.

The final blog I looked at belongs to a Dr Donna Chow. In '10 common mistakes made by first-time maid employers', Chow says that domestic helpers should be treated humanely and paid appropriately but not be allowed to 'run all over our shoulders' (Dr Donna Chow 2017, n.p.). Chow speculates that a FDW might bring 'sexy clothing (for their off days?), potential weapons (to use against you?) or lots of valuables (from another household?)' into the house. Employers should install CCTV in the house to detect unsuitable behaviour. If they have to eat out together, the employer should order the food for the FDW. Finally, Chow advocates rewards for good work and zero tolerance of 'stealing things, telling lies or abusing your children'. In her second posting Chow warns that a steam iron is 'a potential weapon for anyone who gets real mad and out of control' while a Chinese cleaver should be stored 'away until you are sure of the mental well-being of your help' (Dr Donna Chow 2016, n.p.).

Blogs allow employers to let off steam and complain about their domestic helpers and the employment system. How-

ever, the dominant representation of FDWs is as unreliable, dishonest, abusive, demanding, and even dangerous.

The Self-representation of FDWs in their Poetry
After considering domestic helpers' experience and representation in civil society, let us now see how the women portray themselves. The Singapore mainstream characterises FDWs in a reductionist way, either trivialising them as literally belonging to the 'household' in accordance with Silvey's (2006) masculine/feminine binary, or viewing them as dangerous. However, the picture emerging from the poems by the FDWs challenges such trivialisation by gender or type of work. The poems depict women functioning in a transnational space, earning money and showing considerable agency, as they improve the lives of family members back home. Although their day-to-day lives are often affected by capillary flows of power (Foucault 1977) in a neo-colonial space, within it they represent themselves as creative human beings who make material difference to their families outside of it by sending remittances, continuing relationships, and providing maternal care transnationally. The 15 poems quoted from here were entries to the Singapore Migrant Worker Poetry Competition for the years 2015-2016 and can be found on the competition website along with details of the authors. Some poems were written in English, while others were translated from Tagalog and Bahasa Indonesia; the translations used here were taken from the poetry competition website.

When quoting the poems I use the name of the author, followed by her country of origin (PH or ID) and the year in which she took part in the poetry competition in brackets. There are eight by Filipinas and seven by Indonesians. Rolinda has two poems and these are referred to as Rolinda1 and Rolinda2 respectively. Basic information on the poets is given in Table 1:

Name	From	Poem Year	Comment
Manik Sri Bandar	ID	2016	Vocalist for traditional music
Nur Hidayati	ID	2016	Has a child in ID
Susilowati	ID	2016	
Wiwik Triwi-narsih	ID	2016	
Sharasyamsi-Yahya	ID	2015	
Anjia Mutiara	ID	2015	
Pujiati	ID	2015	Studying in open univer-sity
Edna Manatad	PH	2016	Former com-pany manager
Joan Bastatas Ferrer	PH	2016	

Rolinda Es-panola	PH	2016	Has 7-year-old daughter in PH
Juliet Ugay-Dumo	PH	2016	Has an 11-year-old son in PH
Rea Maac	PH	2016	Production inspector in PH
Glory-Ann R. Balista	PH	2015	Has a son in PH
Rolinda O. Espanola	PH	2015	
Grimaldo Rioflorido	PH	2015	A hotel restaurant worker in PH

Table 1.Basic information about the poets. Summarised from The Migrant Worker Poetry Competition details posted at https://www.singaporeworkerpoetry.com/co-py-of-poets and https://www.singaporeworkerpoetry.com/copy-of-poets-1.

I discovered seven principal themes in the women's self-representation: change agent, one who sacrifices for others, overcomer, person of faith, victim, moth-er, and lover. I illustrate each theme with extracts from the poems to let these subalterns speak for themselves. Filipinas are often slightly older than their Indonesian counterparts and more are married. Their better English and stronger democratic tradition make them more out-spoken.

Change agent

Many women work as FDWs because of the economic disparities between their home nations and Singapore. Despite enduring considerable hardship, they exercise agency resulting in positive change for themselves and their families.

Edna (PH, 2016), a company manager in her own country, writes:

> [I] leave those who are dear to me
> For a better life, for the future I see

Anjia (ID, 2015) uses the words 'warrior' and 'burning zeal'. These lines encapsulate her ambition:

> Let my wings flap
> Till they fill the pale clouds with colour
> Streak like lightning, single-minded,
> Soar high to reach all my goals

These single women probably intend to use the money and opportunity in Singapore for personal improvement.

More commonly, however, the authors are bringers of change for their families.

Rolinda1 writes(PH, 2016):

> Finally, I can help my family
> Fearless, I will sacrifice to provide them happiness

In her poem Juliet (PH, 2016) is a 'breadwinner' who believes:

> In exchange for a better future and money,
> a necessity to make my own [family] worry-free and happy.

In the following poems, the agency suggested by 'help', 'provide', 'make', and 'support' contrasts with the passivity of FDWs within Singapore families:

Glory Ann (PH, 2015):

> I just wanted to make
> A bright future for you

Rolinda2 (PH, 2015):

> To work abroad is the only decent act I know
> To support your education and give a better tomor-
> row

Grimaldo (PH, 2015):

> Because she wants to earn money
> To achieve on the glory
> Not only for herself and also for the family

Women who sacrifice for others

Related to 'change agent' is self-sacrifice, as many FDWs work abroad to benefit others. For Rolinda1 the sacrifice is personal and emotional; being looked down upon and considered second class is a loss of dignity.

Rolinda1 (PH, 2016):

> Fearless, I will sacrifice to provide them happiness
> To be a maid in a foreign land
> Where people look down on us
> But for my family, I am a hero

Juliet's sacrifice is emotional and physical (PH, 2016):

> Years of sacrifice and patience,
> of many sleepless nights and absence.
> Years of being far away and being a breadwinner,

Rolinda2 (PH, 2015) tells her young daughter there was no alternative:

> So here I am going far from you
> And wish someday you'll understand what did I do
> To work abroad is the only decent act I know

Grimaldo's (PH, 2015) absence was a sacrifice for family:

> She decided to leave the country
> As she faced her own journey
> In a place that has a lot of opportunity
> For the sake of her beloved family

Overcomer

In the poetry the women rise above physical and emotional hardship. Although their intersectionality of gender, race, and class suggests weakness and powerlessness, the FDWs portray themselves as strong and patient.

Joan (PH, 2016) comments:

> all the trials that
> I have endured
> Because of this, two decades
> Have passed,

Rolinda1 (PH, 2016) also talks of enduring:

> Each year I endured
> I hope that one day my masters will change their
> treatment

Juliet (PH, 2016) has survived great emotional and physical torment:

> Years of sacrifice and patience,

> of many sleepless nights and absence.
> Countless days of longing and sadness
> combined with regrets and endless stress.
>
> Years of nightmares, restrictions and isolation,
> and the law at the time was missing in action.

Grimaldo (PH, 2015) speaks of resilience:

> She knows she needs to be strong
> From the time she felt alone
> She will stand on her own
> Because she wants to earn money

Finally, Anjia (ID, 2015) sees the financial reward beyond grief and physical exertion:

> Banish my stream of tears
> Wipe my dripping sweat
> With my wages.

Women of faith

Many Filipina FDWs are Christians while most Indonesians are Muslim. For some of the women, God is present with them, acts in their interest, and is reliable and faithful.

One third of Manik's (ID, 2016) poem either mentions or addresses God, the 'soul-shepherd' whose faith is

eternal. She also writes:

> Longing for YOUR-love …
> Longing for YOUR-care …
> My God …!

Fellow Indonesian Wiwik (ID, 2016) also longs for God and 'his greatness':

> Isn't the Almighty everything?
> The sky will not fall, said the wanderer,
> As long as He's not wrathful.

Their compatriot Nur (ID, 2016) asks God to be with her son -

> Then I whispered my prayer to you
> Hoping that God, will always be there too
> In everywhere you go
> And in everything you do

Joan (PH, 2016) contrasts Singapore's beauty and wealth with her loneliness, yet:

> Despite all of this;
> I am grateful to God the Almighty
> For the peace of mind
> That I have.
> Thanks to the Holy Father,
> For all the trials that

I have endured.

Although autobiographical, Grimaldo's (PH, 2015) 'The Journey of My Life' is written in the third person. In the central section we read:

> She starts the day with a Prayer
> Praying for the health and safety of everyone
> And thanking for what He done…
>
> And every time she do that she always keep smiling
> Because she know God is there watching everybody
> Watching everybody and also with her
> So she got a peace of mind day by day

Finally, Juliet (PH, 2016) does not appeal to God but describes Singapore as:

> a land of promise and convenience
> where faith is a luck or just coincidence.

Christianity is popular among middle and upper class Singaporeans, those most likely to have live-in domestic helpers; Juliet's comment seems like an accusation of hypocrisy.

Victim

Many authors portray themselves as victims. Rolinda1 (PH, 2016) describes the effects of inadequate food:

> I lost my weight, I am too skinny
> Sadly, noodles and bread, the only meal I eat

Grimaldo's (PH, 2015) poem claims:

> For the success of her JOURNEY
> she went by she will sleep late at night
> And she will wake up before the sunrise

Moving away from the physical, Manik (ID, 2016) writes:

> And the lucid dew cools my soul,
> Banishing the anger
> From the tempest of my broken heart.

Two Filipinas comment on loneliness and isolation. Silence and loneliness engulf Joan (PH, 2016), while Juliet (PH, 2016) talks of Countless days of longing and sadness combined with regrets and endless stress.

Rolinda1's (PH, 2016) account is disturbing:

> No phone, no daily dip nor even brushing is allowed
> Never talk to anyone, even to fellow Filipinos
>
> My daily suffering is making me lose my sanity
> Work is what I am here for, but why are they doing this to me?

In her 'Desolation and request of mother to son', Glory

Ann (PH, 2015) the poet expresses a mother's loneliness:

> Feelings of sadness in my heart
> I just endure.
> When I sleep at night
> I wish,
> you are next to me
> I try to close my eyes…
> But cannot stop the tears flowing.

Mother

Motherhood appears more in the poems by Filipinas. Nur's poem is entitled 'Perfect lullaby' and Glory Ann's is the heart-breaking 'Desolation and request of mother to son'. Rolinda's poems are for her seven year-old daughter. Juliet is a single parent with an 11 year-old son.

Joan (PH, 2016) thanks God for being able to endure for two decades, but comments:

> But most of all, my family, my children
> Are dearly missed;
> In this restless heart of mine.

Glory Ann (PH, 2015) misses her son:

> Because being far with you
> Is very difficult and painful.
> Hopefully you hear, Son!
> This is my little wish,
> That I have to create opportunities

> To again express to you
> My love and tenderness.

The same is true of Juliet (PH, 2016):

> Smiles from my son's face will be visible,
> and all those years of absence will become accept-
> able.

In her imagination Rolinda2 (PH, 2015) has been there for her daughter. She writes:

> I wish to see you blow those candles each year
> To be a part of the crowd who sing and cheer
> I wish to be on that stage every school end
> To see those beaming smile when medals and rib-
> bons pinned
> I wish to give you bath, dress up and tie your hair
> To hold your hand and walk to school
> and be glad if you say its my mom standing there
> I wish to hug you every time you come home crying
> To make your milk and on the light if your dream-
> ing
> But more than that I wish to be a good mother

Finally, Nur (ID, 2016) seems to have left when her child was very small. In 'Perfect Lullaby' we see how her identity is wrapped up with the child:

> From the first time I welcomed you into my world
> You've become my kind of hope

You are my joy
You are my tears
Your smile cast away my fears
You are my sunshine
You are my pouring rain
You are my strength

Lover

The final theme is 'lover'. Three younger wom-
en from Indonesia write to their significant others.

In Sharasyamsi's (ID, 2015) poem each stanza ap-
peals to the power of the wind to achieve some-
thing shared with another person: 'our destination',
'our hopes', 'two hearts' and finally 'a blessed union':

You,
Be the wind to my clouds
so that I may go forth confidently
to our destination

You,
Be the wind to my kite
so that I no longer fear crossing
the skies of our hopes

You,
Be the wind to all life
Show them the way

and my way back
treading the inspiration of two hearts

You,
Be the wind that gives life to my dreams
my hope and my love
you alone are my dream
may we be joined
in a blessed union
that is no longer taboo

A composition by Pujiati (ID, 2015) is all about the desire to be with a loved one:

Gazing at the sea
I feel myself drowning
In the depths
Of your heart

The roar of the waves
washes away
the melancholy
Of my love-longing

The waving coconut palms
Tell of how it feels
When two hearts
Become one

In her poem, Wiwik (ID, 2016) appears to be thinking of a lover as she asks: "Am I missing you?"

Two Siti's: The Two Representations Compared

Poems by FDWs show a very different representation from that in mainstream Singapore society. In government guidelines, domestic helpers are a resource to be managed and used, while in the press they are helpless victims or suspicious characters. Employment agencies portray them as well behaved and keen to please, if a little slow. In some blogs they are characterised as malicious and potentially dangerous.

To many Singaporeans, FDWs are a necessary evil allowing them lifestyle and employment options. Many Singapore women can only work in demanding, full-time jobs if someone else cooks, runs the home, and looks after the children. In their poems the FDWs represent themselves as tenacious and resilient in the grip of an inherently unfair employment system and exploitative working and living conditions. The women demonstrate agency and determination as they undergo various neo-colonial privations to better themselves or their loved ones. It is ironic that civil society portrays the FDWs as weak and helpless when they are as capable and resourceful as the Singaporean women liberated by their labours. The FDWs are trapped within a neoliberal, neo-colonial power dynamic constituted by Singapore employment law, yet the poems reveal a form

of agency from below and resilience which seems to undermine both the power of employers and the system, as well as the unjust portrayal in the public sphere.

The Singapore representation focuses on what domestic helpers do, good and bad, whereas their own poetry is concerned with who they are and how they feel. While the Singapore mainstream reduces FDWs to functional elements in some kind of Foucauldian power/knowledge relationship, their own poems provide a rounded and human representation. Indeed, after the 2016 poetry competition, Singapore poet Alvin Pang confessed, 'So many of us have domestic helpers, but don't imagine they have an intellectual life. This blows that wide open' (Ho 2016). He also asks, 'Do we expect poetry from those whom we see solely as low-wage, low-skilled workers?' (Kuah 2018). Speaking in 2016, Edna Manatad (one of whose poems I feature) commented, 'People belittle and judge us because of our job, but an event like this is a way of saying, here I am and I have talent to show' (Martin 2016). The views of both Singaporean and Filipina poet deconstruct any simple notion of colonial centre and periphery, and the portrayal of those at the margins in essentialised and functionalist terms.

It is presumably no small thing for a migrant at the bottom of Singapore's socio-economic ladder to enter a poem in a national competition which seeks to empower foreign labourers. Singapore does not welcome publicly

voiced dissent and FDW poetry is unlikely to be excessively critical – biting the hand that feeds you is never a good idea. While there is mention of suffering and ill-treatment, most authors focus on love for their families and desire to improve their lives. Despite the difficulties, much of what is written is positive, the FDWs seeing themselves as hardworking and resourceful. In a transnational space rarely thought about by Singaporeans, they remain in touch with family, carry out remote mothering, and provide financial resources for those back home. The FDWs in the poems are physically in Singapore but strongly connected with friends and family at home. In a circumscribed way, the domestic helpers manifest power from below (Foucault 1980), remaining faithful to the desires and expectations of their own people rather than the exploitative mechanism of Singapore.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at a small sample of poems by Indonesian and Filipino domestic helpers in Singapore, comparing the self-representation of the women with that of government guidelines, the press, maid agency websites, and blogs in the Singapore mainstream.

Two different representations exist. While the Singapore mainstream paints foreign domestic helpers as slightly threatening or somewhat hapless, their own poems portray strength and endurance as they provide for their families. The women write more about their feelings for

their loved ones than the injustices they face, without ignoring these. While they cannot resist the neo-colonial forces which constrain their lives, in a personal way these women construct an alternative narrative. In a modest but significant way, the poems undermine an assumed polarity of power and agency associated with a neo-colonial center and periphery and deconstruct an unjust and reductionist portrayal of the FDWs in Singapore.

Without directly critiquing the migrant worker employment system in their poems, the FDWs subvert it through depictions of agency, resilience, and love. Within one small country there exists a tale of two Siti's, two descriptions of life and work as a foreign domestic servant living in someone else's family home. One appears cold and essentialising while the other is rich, personal, and closely linked to home.

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Contemporary Arab Petrofiction: Opening up Biopolitical Spaces for the Dispossessed

Saima Bashir and Sohail Ahmad Saeed

> It is only right, to my mind, that things so re-
> markable, which happen to have remained un-
> heard and unseen until now, should be brought
> to the attention of many and not lie buried in
> the sepulchre of oblivion.
>
> —Anonymous, *Lazarillo de Tormes*

The twentieth century could rightly be called the Century of Oil and the Century of America. This century

made the United States reach the peak of its world hegemony through oil, a situation which would be inevitably followed by peak oil at some future temporal point, as proposed by the American geologist, M. King Hubbert[1], in 19561. Hubbert's peak oil theory—that maximum oil extraction would lead to a terminal decline in oil production—accords with Trotsky's 1924 prophecy about the future of oil in America. Trotsky had highlighted that oil played an exceptional role in the United States' military and industrial departments, and that oil consumption in the United States equalled two-thirds of the world output of oil. Geologists were of the view that with America's rate of oil consumption, American oil would last for twenty five to forty years. Then America would use its industry and fleet to take away oil from all over the world (Ali 2002, 288).

Peak oil has thus become the nemesis of the American dreams of unbridled oil-hegemonic growth. The United States' petroleum-based geopolitical strategies, being mostly incendiary, did give rise to such petro-despotic aspirations. The want for oil led the 'mighty superpower' to more and more political interventions. Oil has not only been the cause of the United States' international entanglements and imperial designs, but also a prime source of its repute as a bully and its vulnerable strategies (Nixon 2011, 72). As the 1970s and 1980s moved along with the Arab oil crises having come and gone, the United States' domestic sources of petroleum largely dried

up and the geopolitical struggle for control of access to oil reserves took on an increasingly pronounced role in the world affairs. In this global scenario, a number of literary voices appeared decrying the ravages inflicted by Big Oil upon the spaces of traditional societies. These voices identified oil as primarily a resource curse. The idea of oil as a resource curse is hinged upon a paradox of abundance. The more a nation-state is blessed with the plenitude of an energy resource, the greater are the chances that the state would get concomitantly spoilt. Mineral-enriched states are more often than not undem-ocratic, war-mongering, riddled with corruption and governed by despots. The oligarch in a resource-cursed state never encourages strong ties between the ruled and the ruler. Such situations give birth to exaggerated forms of inequalities which are both horizontal and vertical. The first form of inequality is implied in the creation of a geographical split between resource-producing enclaves and the rest of the nation; while the ever-increasing rift between super-rich and ultra-poor classes denotes the second form of imbalance (Nixon 2011, 68-70).

There exists a crucial relationship between literature and energy. If the lens of energy, particularly energy as the base of economics, is used to contemplate and interpret literature, then modes of production can be critically discussed functioning as a force field for cul-tural production. Literary texts can be sorted according to the energy sources which made them possible. For

example, the coal obsessions of David, Henry Roth's protagonist in *Call it Sleep* (1934), can be compared with those of Paul, the second son of a coal miner in D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913); Charles Dickens' tallow-burning characters can be juxtaposed with those of Shakespeare. Woods marching in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), the colossal windmills in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-1615), the smogs in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), the electrical power pilfered at the opening of Ralph Ellison' novel *Invisible Man* (1952), and the dung fuel in Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths* (1962) can be joined in a new repertoire of analysis energized by class and resource conflict breaking into visibility. Sources of energy appear into texts as force fields having cause-and-effect relationships other than commodity wars and class conflicts. The magical powers of electricity, the apprehensions roused by atomic residuum, coal polluted odours, the use of technology to chop woods, the whale oil's viscous animality, and finally the oil: every one of these resources serves as a concrete instance to represent an altering phenomenology. Thus a literary text can relate itself to its originating modes of production by making them its quasi objects.

The present age is the age of petroleum. Graeme Macdonald, in his article "Oil and World Literature," rightly says that every modern novel is to some extent an oil novel, taking into account the ubiquity of oil and its components in the substance and structure of modern

life. Just as the provenance of this energy resource is automatically international, cultural production in the era of petromodernity inevitably moves along the same global course (Macdonald 2012, 7, 31). However, in the context of the literature-energy relationship, it must be noted that the long history of the American titanic drama of petro-imperialism has surprisingly failed to produce any Great American Oil Novel (GAON). This literary barrenness was first pointed out and discussed in detail by Amitav Ghosh in his article "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel" (2002, 74-87) while reviewing Abdel Rahman Munif's petronarrative *Cities of Salt* (1984).

Arab Modernism versus Petro-Imperialism

Background

The long history of the earlier European colonialisms of the Orient, the United States' never-ending hunger for more and more fossil fuels and the consequent fallout of crises in the Middle East gave rise to Arab Modernism which is primarily a tendency of disruption and subversion in contemporary Arab literature. This tendency prompted a new generation of Arab writers to question, and throw into doubt, the all-too-easy evolutionary and Eurocentric narratives of modernity and development, including the narrative of national independence (Makdisi 1995, 87). The imperialist narratives of Europe's

self-definition in relation to the colonial Other were produced by the slowly modernizing European societies of the nineteenth century. Such narratives were intertwined not only with the developing doctrines of evolution, but also with a new version of colonialism in which modern Europe's cultural others came to be seen as underdeveloped. The European colonial discourse, in other words, was predicated upon a unilinear 'stream' of evolutionary Time, as delineated by Johannes Fabian in his book, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983). On this stream of Time the colonized 'Others' were farther behind the Europeans—the self-proclaimed representatives of modernity. These 'Others' needed to be 'raised' and 'improved' to become identical to modern Europe; they needed to be propelled 'up' the stream of Time to the shores and breakwaters of modernity (Fabian 1983, xl-xliii). The problem was aggravated when, by degrees, these 'Others' also started seeing themselves as inferior 'Others'. Among them there were the people who rejected the assumed superiority of Europe; but they too posed their opposition to it in those discursive and narrative terms which were invented and presented by Europe. This was their dilemma. They had to participate in exactly that discursive and conceptual system of modernity which they attempted to repudiate. As a result, very often their challenges appeared not as challenges; rather they were fated to be defused or negated (Makdisi 1995, 88).

The seemingly overwhelming superiority of the Western empires was doubled by the mercantile and industrial structures of capital imbricated with them. In the nineteenth century, the Arab world was gradually incorporated into the dual structure of colonialism and capitalism. Arab philosophers and writers found themselves trapped between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Some of them advocated a return to, and revitalization of, the classical Arabic heritage; others thought that the only way out of the double bind was 'forward,' towards progress, development, modernization and ultimately 'Europe'. The premise of a dualistic opposition between tradition and modernity, evolution and involution was accepted by advocates of both positions. The historical assumption was that the modernity chartered by Europe as a goal was like entering into the flow of the stream of evolutionary Time, while a rejection of that 'goal' meant trying to move 'backward' against the powerful 'forward' current of history. Advocates of modernity called for a 'Nahda' which meant cultural and scientific renaissance or rebirth. As a goal, modernity was a future condition, a future location, a future possibility, always displaced and deferred, always up the stream, up in the sky.

It was in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) that Frantz Fanon portrayed colonialism as regionalist and separatist in its very structure. According to him, it does not merely assert the existence of tribes but also reinforces it and thereby separates them (1963, 94). By the start of

the twentieth century, instead of a united Arab world, 'nation-state' became an indispensable condition for the Arab modernity. According to Albert Hourani, "To be independent was to be accepted by European states on a level of equality . . . To be modern was to have a political and social life similar to those of the countries of western Europe" (1988, 343-44). Hence a number of independent Arab states came into being along the fragmentary and arbitrary lines drawn up and militarily imposed by the great European empires; and the Nahda-inspired goal of 'modernization' led to a drive to 'development' restricted to the scale of the nation-state. State-defined units of the Arab world bore no resemblance to the economic and political needs or population distribution of the Arab people: for example, the oil-rich, thinly populated pigmy states of the Gulf imported about 90 percent of their workforce from other Arab countries, while most of their capital outflow was directed towards the developed capital markets of Europe, East Asia and the United States, leaving the Arab world deprived (Makdisi 1995, 95).

The advocates of modernization were doomed to face an all-too-apparent monumental failure. Modernity, as defined by the Europeans and their clueless admirers among the Arabs, remained a perpetually deferred future status instead of ever being or becoming an apprehensible present one. The drive towards modernity gave the Arab world nothing less than the disaster of Palestinian

Nakbah[2], the destruction of Lebanon during and after recurrent civil wars[3] and the ever-growing subordination and mortification at the hands of the United States, Europe and Israel.

A reaction to all this gave birth to Arab Modernism. This literary tendency is most detectible in the context of a cultural and political crisis in the Arab world, which itself is produced and identified by this tendency. Such a Modernist tendency is opposed not only to the Nahda, but also to the Nahda-associated literary and novelistic forms and styles. These Nahda-based forms and styles are exemplified by a wide range of Arabic novels: from the earliest novels of the late nineteenth century to those following the World War II. To the earlier category of Nahda belong romantic and historical novels like *The Conquest of Andalusia* (1903) by Jurji Zaydan, *A Period of Time* (1907) by Muhammad al Muwaylihi, and *Zeinab* (1913) by Muhammad Hussein Haykal. The latter category consists of novels and stories by Yahya Haqqi, the early Naguib Mahfouz, and the early Tayeb Salih. An uncomplicated realist narrative with an omniscient narrator and a straightforward chronological and temporal structure are the most common features of these earlier works. Such texts were mostly inspired by, or imitations of, different European literatures. The reason for this is pointed out by Anis Makdisi as follows: "Most of what was available to the reading public from the end of the last century to the second third of the present one took

the form of translations of or adaptations from Western cultural production" (1988, 371).

Contrary to the Nahda and its styles, the oeuvres of Arab Modernism were composed either during or after a series of calamitous ruptures and breaks with the past. These ruptures had very much to do with the shared Arab experience of imperialism, the ongoing confrontation with Israel, Europe and the United States, and the persistence of neocolonial relations of power and domination. These relations locked the independent Arab states into a condition of subalternity, reminiscent of that of the nineteenth century. This subalternity was defined and enabled not only by the neocolonial situation in the Arab world but also by the bitter divisions and lines of demarcation by which Arab states separated themselves from one another. In spite of becoming technically independent, the formerly colonized nation-states were still dependent upon former colonial forces and newly emergent imperial powers like the United States. These powers still held the sway and continued playing a pivotal part via the global capitalist machinery and varieties of psychological, cultural, educational and institutional monopolisation. The Arab Modernist tendency challenged both the political and literary approaches formerly practised in Arab society. The bases of such approaches were a unilinear interpretation of history, teleology, a narrowly envisaged nationalism, and modernity. Both capitalist institutions and socialist revolutions always held open

the promise of such modernity which constantly proved to be a postponed future bliss. Thus, the claims of Arab Modernism were staked in opposition to both the West and the actually existing Arab nation-states.

Trends

Arab modernism is basically a literature of crisis, which means that it is not merely a reaction to certain historical or sociopolitical circumstances, but also a reproduction of what in the Arab world is a 'sense of crisis'. It historicizes that sense of crisis through the creation of those historical concepts and categories inclusive of discontinuities and ruptures which enable an evaluative interrogation or understanding of the present. It also defines those historical conditions which let the contemporary take place or be intelligible. This literary trend is helpful in producing the expression as well as the reality of crisis itself. It is not just a replication of reality but also a cause of the production of the 'Real' in the Arab world. The main literary works, symptomatic of this tendency, include Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1963), Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar* (1967), Emile Habibi's *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1974), Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), Elias Khoury's *Little Mountain* (1977), Abdel Rahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984), Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* (1985), Sherif Hatata's *The Net* (1986), and Hanan al-Sheikh's *Scent*

of the Gazelle (1988). In spite of their major differences, these works can be grouped together to recognize the extent of the continuity of their cultural, political and historical projects with regard to modernity, and the extent of the challenges posed by them to the project of the Nahda and various proponents of 'traditionalism'.

These Modernist novels reject all unproblematic, univocal relationships to either past or future, in terms of both narrative and history. In their temporal structures, the possibility of a return to a mythic past is rejected along with the alternative possibility of an uncompromised and perpetually deferred great leap 'forward' to development. All that is left is a greatly unstable and contradictory present, defying the false reassurances of old and new dogmatisms. These texts bespeak only an uncompromising and unavoidable present. Such a historical present, according to the foregoing Modernist world-view, can only be reshaped by renouncing Eurocentric constructs and interpretations of 'tradition' and 'modernity', and replacing them with alternative formulations and constructions of history. In such historical reconstructions, the so-called 'Third Worldians' are not just incorporated or added as 'underdeveloped' and inferior 'Others', rather they exist as independent, self-conscious multiplicities.

Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1963), Abdel Rahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984) and all the other works

coming under the loose rubric of Arab Modernism demand new ways of conceptualizing the present. These works are brought together across the boundaries dividing the Arab world through their simultaneous rejection of those boundaries and the teleological formulation of modernity as a perpetually deferred future condition. Both Eurocentric modernization and Islamic traditionalism are not acceptable to such an Arab Modernism. Rather it insists on the historical present, and the need to confront problems in and for the present, rather than the endless invocation of impossible and temporal alternatives (posts or pasts). Modernity is not only challenged but also redefined as an undesirable present condition, rather than as an ambiguous future one: this is modernity, we are already there, and this is it. Far-fetched goals of the early nationalist movements of the so-called Arab renaissance, the prospects of national economic development in the form of independent states, are implicitly rejected as phantasmatic impossibilities. Arising from a sense of crisis, Arab Modernism came to be premised upon the framework of a modernity apprehended as an immediate present experience, rather than a utopian (or dystopian) future condition. To some extent, Arab Modernism resembles the European 'modernism' of the post-World War I era: the period of revolution and the crisis of modernity in Europe. Arab Modernism, however, is not a simple recapitulation of an earlier European 'modernism'. According to Raymond Williams, the various European modernisms, constructed along a

certain metropolitan/imperial axis, narrated the projects of European imperialism, while Arab Modernism must be understood as a counter-narrative of those projects as well as their aftereffects (1989, 1-208). Although the importance of the nation-state as the fundamental unit of a European-defined modernization was stressed by its advocates, Arab Modernism challenges the finality and desirability of that unit.

As a matter of definition, modernity can never exist in a pure form; it always implies a certain degree of hybridization, a certain degree of mixture with the pre- or anti-modern. Arab Modernism contests the unilinear notion of History, and invalidates the possibility of an uncomplicated flow toward the modern and away from tradition. It insists on the immanence of modernity as an eternally imperfect blend of different stages and scales of advancement, a perpetually fragmentary fusion of tropes, narratives, forms and styles. In this sense, modernity becomes a 'process', the completion of which involves an incessant want of completion.

Arab Modernism is also relentless about the region's colonial history, its troubled status in the neocolonial world today, and the consequences of both colonialism and neocolonialism for cultural production and activity, and political and economic 'development'. This Modernism stands in a mutually determining relationship to European and American postmodernisms as their simultaneous

and necessary counterpart. According to Fredric Jameson's argument, if postmodernism is the first world 'cultural logic' of late capitalism, then Arab Modernism can be perceived as postmodernism's third world symbiotic and antagonistic 'other' (1991, 297-418). Understood in this way, the difference between 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' is no more a question of temporality and of 'stages' of development: just as Arab Modernism does not follow the footsteps of the various European modernisms, it would not follow their transformation into a postmodernism that, in Jameson's words, arises out of a situation of completed modernization (1991, 1-10). Arab Modernism is no longer the evolutionary temporal logic of modernity, but rather one of the structural limits of capitalist economic development and of late capitalism itself. Any theorization of global culture involves the contradictory co-existence of modernity and postmodernity, a co-existence that is situated within global postmodernism because it necessitates the co-existence of contradictory modes of cultural and economic production, the 'synchronism of the nonsynchronous', to cite Ernst Bloch's famous phrase (1977, 22-38).

The contrast between first world postmodernism and third world postcolonialism can be perplexing. Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock are of the view that the term 'postcolonialism' is theoretically misleading and politically suspect (Shohat 1992, 99-113; McClintock 1992, 84-98). This theoretically simplistic and politically haz-

ardous opposition can only help to reinscribe the evolutionary logic of modernity and of the nineteenth century European sense of historicism. The postcolonial has come to replace the 'third world,' but it does so specifically by substituting a spurious temporal logic ('after' colonialism) for an admittedly problematic spatial logic (worlding). This substitution is particularly spurious and politically dangerous because it has done nothing to correct the limitations of the term 'third world.' Rather it has redefined the very same third world according to the political temporality of modernity itself, merely adding the hint that somehow colonialism was all along a third world problem and had nothing to do with the first world. While the first world is basking in the wonders of a high-tech postmodernity, the third world is still defined by the dilemmas first encountered in the old European colonial era, from which the first world has escaped any taint or guilt by (historic) association. Just as all were involved in colonialism together, now all must be either postcolonial or not. The very suggestion, implicit in the term 'postcolonial', that somehow colonialism is over and done with, presents severe problems for theoretical analysis and political action. The Gulf War is just one example to show that in the sphere of economic, military and political control and domination, a thorough deployment of proper colonial practices can be largely witnessed in the neocolonial world of today. The term 'postcolonial' encloses the idea of a world which is defined even now in a global sense through perseverance

of certain structures of colonialism and matrixes of neocolonial domination and mastery. What gets effaced in the experience of colonialism is the present, and the very possibility of grasping the present; announcing a 'post' is no more historically or politically enabling than resurrecting a 'past'.

The problem faced by the third world is to devise entirely new concepts with which to come to terms with a wide range of cultural, social, economic, and political crises. Arab Modernism is one configuration, one constellation, within a larger effort throughout the third world, and the first world as well, to invent new codes of understanding, an effort that some critics and theorists have identified too hastily as one, unified postcolonial endeavor. Frantz Fanon once said:

> If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. (1963, 314)

The production of new concepts does not involve further steps along the path of a unilinear history, which implies further deferral, but rather an intervention in this present with which, as Fanon said, "[we] feel from time to time . . . immeasurably sickened" (1963, 315).

Munif and Kanafani: Pioneers of Arab Modernism

Abdel Rahman Munif (1933–2004) and Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972) are among the pioneers of Arab Modernism. By making use of unconventional inventive techniques of writing, they upset normative hegemonic discourse and open up ways for the development of varied interpretations. Their texts reinforce their own innate susceptibility, besieged language and undecidability. These texts are like incomplete drafts of violated memory of history. The writings of these authors had much to do with their personal life-world experiences. Munif and Kanafani had both led their lives as exiles. During the oil boom in the Gulf, they willy-nilly partook in the gigantic trend of migration. At that time, society in the Gulf was in dire need of a refined type of bureaucratic middle class which could manage its newly established enterprises and institutions. So, poorer Arab countries like Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Egypt became the centres of exporting educated labour to the Gulf. Like Munif and Kanafani, there were many immigrants who formed a new secretarial class in the Gulf. This class occasioned the emergence of a subgenre of Arabic oil literature. In Shakir Nablusi's words, the Gulf novel could only come into being with an imported bourgeoisie—a class whose wealth, ennui, and intrigues are documented in the literature (1991, 195). For nearly twenty years, Munif worked in the oil industry. The politics of

petroleum production is the main concern of his initial fiction. But his masterpiece Cities of Salt can be rightly called a five-volume journal of the contemporary history of Saudi Arabia. Its 'Valley of Springs' or 'Wadi al-Uyoun' is Abqaiq in a very lightly camouflaged form. Abqaiq was an oasis which was transformed, like Wadi al-Uyoun, into Saudi Arabia's leading oil field and became the opening place of the Tapline or the Trans-Arabian Pipeline. Munif's text chronicles the arrival and installation of American oil workers in Wadi al-Uyoun, a fictitious idyllic oasis, their disruption of its environmental conditions and basic rhythm of life, and their transformation of the coastal town of Harran into the base of their operations and transport depot.

Kanafani too belonged to this class of immigrant intellectuals. Having migrated to the Gulf, he worked in Kuwait for five years as a school-teacher (Abbas 1972-3, 146). Radwa Ashour, an Egyptian literary critic and novelist, relates Kanafani's experiences in these words, "There he knew exile in a new form: the loneliness of the stranger, the alienation of the isolated, the thirst of the psychical self in the desert" (1977, 23). And Men in the Sun was the outcome when he returned from the Gulf. Kanafani had led the life of a displaced Palestinian refugee. At the age of twelve, he went through the trauma of becoming a refugee. He lived his life in exile in various Arab countries until his assassination by the Mossad in 1972. The Palestinian-Arab struggle was his inspiration for writing and working incessantly. Men in the Sun has been described as the writer's defence mech-

anism against uprootedness and cruel annihilation. It is the story of the Palestinians in exile who strive to construct or reconstruct their destiny. The story allegorizes the Palestinian refugees' experiences of deracination after the 1948 Nakbah, and their attempts to get away from it. Through his wanderings from Syria to Kuwait, Kanafani had developed his political ideas. He had become a proponent of Marxism. Like George Habash he believed that a social revolution throughout the Arab world was the only solution to the problem of Palestine (qtd in Kilpatrick 1999, i). Like Munif, Kanafani also believed that oil was the only chance to build a future for the Arab world. If the capital outflow from the oil-producing Arab countries had not been directed towards the United States, the picture in the Arab world might have been quite different. There could have been one Arab economy instead of twenty or thirty competing Arab economies, with the revenues from the oil resources of the little Gulf emirates more evenly and more productively distributed within and throughout the Arab world, instead of being squandered on investments in the global North. This was the vision envisaged by both Munif and Kanafani.

Petrofiction

In the canon of Arabic literature, Munif's *Cities of Salt* and Kanafani's Men in the Sun are a duo, exemplary of ground-breaking petrofiction. The mechanisation of human life is the main subject of these petronarratives. Here the wheel of time is made to spin back, and pre-in-

dustrial utopias are projected in which ideal communities exist. This is the most important characteristic of a petroleum novel: utopias of the past are deployed to highlight the present dystopias, the ravages inflicted by the relentless empire of machines. The novel as a genre essentially signifies a transcendental homelessness which is reflected in its attempt to grasp the meaning of life. This meaning can be apparent only in retrospect, after the whole shape of a particular form of life is known. Thus ontologically, the petroleum novel positions itself as a remembrance. Hence, the pre-industrial state of nature envisaged by Kanafani and Munif is pure, original and primitive in its form. This is a transcendental and transmundane world. In this form of existence man and nature are in harmony with each other. This is a golden age, what Raymond Williams calls "the natural economy, the moral economy, the organic society, from which critical values are drawn . . . a contrast to the thrusting ruthlessness of the new capitalism" (Williams 1973, 36-7). An aura of authenticity is created by linking cultural signification with geographical locales. Wadi al-Uyoun is an oasis in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula with traces of the legendary Najd of traditional Arabic poetry; there is Shatt al-Arab near 'Basra' of the Arabian Nights where the historical rivers Euphrates and Tigris converge to jointly fall into the Gulf of Fars; there is a village with olive groves in pre-Nakbah Palestine. The aura of authenticity, in Aamir Mufti's words, is a pervasive language and mood in which authenticity comes to attach itself to the concepts of certain cultural practices as a kind of aura (2000, 87-8). And this aura of

authenticity itself is a by-product of modernization, an outcome of mass culture. In oil novels enchantment is deliberately imagined, so that the secularizing machine of modernity can deform it, and the lore of progress can extinguish it.

Munif and Kanafani were both products of their own exile. They made use of the aura of authenticity in an effort to recapture the lost lands that fuelled their yearning. Memory—geographical, cultural and racial—is the nucleus of their narratives. This memory is like a live, pounding heart which is rooted deep into the earth. With Munif and Kanafani land is imbued with anthropomorphic traits. The outcome of this technique is that nature is humanized, and humanity is naturalized within the particular geographic space. Ideologically it performs the function of grounding an imported genre—novel—in the native soil. It is also an outlet to criticize imperial modernity, and gives birth to "narratives of cultural continuity that can absorb the dislocations of modernity" (Mufti 2000, 88).

Both narratives make a start with the heart, but culminate in the production of a machine-like entity. The metamorphosis of the human body into a machine is the climax of these stories. In *Cities of Salt,* modern-day oil rigs resemble the fire and brimstone pillars of the ancient Hebrew cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were destroyed through divine retribution. Munif cau-

tions against a Sodom-like mutation of humans into salt. In Kanafani's Men in the Sun, a water tank, an emblem of industrialization, first virtually aborts the relics of country life, and after that delivers the brand new denizen of the hydrocarbon realm. There occurs a ritualistic transition from the older order to the new age of technology which is embodied by and presided over by machines. These are the machines which viciously tear up olive groves and palm trees. They are the prime source of destroying the centric logic of an agrarian existence. Climactic scenes in these novels are full of apocalyptic images. When the order of nature is subverted, man's fall from Eden becomes inevitable, and the paradise is lost. The novel is "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (Lukács 1996, 88). These narratives are the epics of the worlds abandoned by God. Lingering over the ruins, the novelists deplore the loss of their homelands and recount the plagued birth of the mechanical age which looks like an alien existence in the land—a defunct plant growing in the native soil.

Cities of Salt and *Men in the Sun* both open with images of birthing which are expressed as a fecund earth bringing forth its fruit. Agrarian metaphors are employed: seeds are planted, the soil erupts with life, and the link between the land and human processes of reproduction is established through the nurturing of young shoots. These are symbols which demonstrate the ecological relationship between the earth and humanity as well as an organic

relationship between culture and geographical space, race and territory. Edward Said alludes to such images of historical continuity in his book *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983). He speaks of them as "human history being generated, being produced and reproduced in the very way that men and women generate themselves by procreating and elaborating the species . . . Images for historical process are invariably biological." For Said, "ideas about repetition" are just like the procreation and progression of the gens. This continuity is attained through the naturalistic bonds of filiation which stand in opposition to the institutions of affiliative relations (Said 1983, 112). In a Saidian sense, affiliation denotes such coalitions as are grounded in mutual economic interest; so affiliation is dissimilar to the more affective ties of religion, culture, race, blood, kin, and family. Such historical and cultural specificity is split at its roots by the shoving globalization of the industrial age. This severance from one's roots initiates the process of re-imagining or recapturing the bygone: the salvation or reclamation of a natural, pure and organic community which preceded the outsiders' incursion and their gadgets.

In his analysis of the affinity between country and city, Raymond Williams narrates that such wistful golden epochs have been repeatedly contrived by literary generations in succession. An atmosphere of retrospective radicalism prevails in which the values of obligation, charity and an open door to the needy neighbour are

emphasized and contrasted with the capitalist thrust and utilitarian reduction of all social relationships to a crude moneyed order (Williams 1973, 35-6). As advocates of this retrospective radicalism, Kanafani and Munif discern the climax of the age of industry, and the presence of outsiders in native soil as destructive. The paeans they sing in praise of their origins confer fellow feeling upon their narratives and fasten them to Mother Earth. Munif and Kanafani deplore the "liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage" (Benjamin 2002, 104), and yearn for all those things which are lost namely ritual, permanence, authenticity, and origins. But the paradox is that this loss makes them modern novelists. Through this liquidation a bona fide past is reproduced, and a phantasmagoric reverie is concocted. But the ultimate tragedy is that they find no catharsis or emancipation here; the empire of the machine further enslaves and liquidates their experience.

Text as Body

Munif and Kanafani were essentially writer-activists. They were not against change. Towards modernity their approach was ambivalent. Their battle was against the cruelly perverted form of modernization in the Arab world. They had an insistent belief in the power of writing as a tool for change. So far as Munif was concerned, he appropriated a multi-genre tool to assault both the Persian Gulf bourgeois elite and their alien collabora-

tors. His faith in the instrumental value of literature was neither part of an organizational activism nor complementary to an already established literary career. After being disillusioned with organizational resistance, he adopted writing as a compensation for the social transformations he had once dreamt the region's radical movements would bring about. He re-entered politics through the door of literature. For Kanafani, art and politics were interrelated. He believed in the power of art to inspire and challenge newly-developed political actualities.

Hence, Munif and Kanafani make the written text embody both the trauma and the healing, the event and the mode of mourning. They transform the wounds of history into the dream of redemption through the power of their imagination. They construct their "imagined communities"[5] through deconstruction and recreation of traumatic memory. They deliberately grapple with the traumatic pasts of genocide and dispossession in order to be the voice of their peoples and to rewrite history from the Other's perspective. A text which is both literary and biopolitical becomes a domain holding its own particular norms and borders. Here the concept of the 'text' as a 'body' becomes very influential. This is a concept popular in modern discussions on discursive system. The text as a physical site can be useful in eliciting an ethical response from the reader through his intimate communication with the text. From Emmanuel Levinas' point of view, the text, seen as something physically

vulnerable, becomes the 'other' for which the reader is responsible (Levinas 1969). The text as a body stimulates the reader's imaginative creativity and urges him to respond to the other's call. The selected narratives work as reflexive texts. 'Becoming' is a theme common to both the texts. The suffering and cruelty stemming from violation of land and body are represented in written text. Though such written efforts also demonstrate the impossibility of mitigating physical, psychological and historical pain through the writing of text, and prove the impossibility of representation; yet, the very same impossibility gives birth to a 'novel' category of writing which happens and makes its place as a literary space or territory. A responsive relationship is built between the reader and the text. The result is the formation of a literary alliance among people from diverse cultures and nations.

Conclusion

The hopeful note on which this study can be concluded is that art also performs the function of a liberating power because it transcends historical wounds by letting the reader experience them in a different manner. When art makes its way through and beyond space and time to re-examine the infinity, it dissolves the feeling of alienation from nature. Arabian literature generally and Palestinian literatures specifically urge that history should be recreated, reconstructed and retold through a new re-

sponsive consciousness. Post/neo-colonial Arab writers articulate the need for that formation of being which transcends the national by censuring the present national and racial identities within the colonial discourse and by striving to reach beyond such logic to explore new ways of reinterpreting being in its relation to memory. These writers are thus able to leave behind the defensive national discourse which projects the diffidence of the postcolonial subject, and enter into a better transnational and transcultural understanding of colonial histories. This is the literary space from where stems the dire need to confront the discourse of marginality and centrality which still goes on to form the ruling structure of the present-day postcolonial discourse within the academia of the West. The binary oppositions used in postcolonial discourse such as those between the colonized and the colonizer, the third world and the first, the margin and the centre imply that "the nation-state as the unit of political organization globally was taken for granted" (Dirlik 1998, 502). Through a text, the writer functions as an agency to channel the collective voice. And the enterprises of rewriting the collective memory are a "permission to narrate" (Said 1984, 27-48) the other histories of excluded and muted narratives—in the present study the dispossessed and dislocated Palestinian Arabs and Saudi Arabian Bedouin. These texts are an embodiment of the collective "power of expression that can be shared" (Hardt and Negri 2001, 243). In addressing one another, transnational narratives frame such a con-

structive discourse among various histories of persecution as can transcend the limits of the national. These texts unlock productive and innovative possibilities for 'becoming', shaping translocal alliances among writers belonging to different nation-states from all over the world. Such transnational discourse opens up new openings for articulation, and can remap the violent pasts as well as diaspora into alternative positionalities. In this way it can enable a reconstructive process of 'becoming'. The transnational histories depicted in *Cities of Salt* and *Men in the Sun* are linked through the shared experiences of pain and agony. The result is a new type of postcolonial literature foregrounding that ever-present multiplicity which has always been denied by the colonial space. Such biopolitical literature is capable of producing a new form of writing which is simultaneously literary and political because it shatters the very core of imperial fabric and its postcolonial residues.

Notes:

1. Tyler Priest. "Hubbert's Peak: The Great Debate over the End of Oil," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 44, no.1 (2014): 37-79.

2. The exodus and deracination of more than 700,000 Palestinians in 1948 after the Palestine War and the es-

tablishment of the Zionist state of Israel in Palestine is called Nakbah.

3. The Lebanese Civil War, lasting from 1975 to 1990, caused the displacement, exodus and deaths of millions including the Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon.

4. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London, NY: Verso, 2006).

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Kwakoe, Baba & Mai: Revisiting Dutch Colonialism in Suriname

Praveen Sewgobind

The former Dutch colony of Suriname is, interestingly, geographically located in what is called "Latin America," yet is culturally and politically more entangled with the Caribbean region. Historically, these links have their roots in a colonial history and contemporaneity that aligns European powers such as Britain and the Netherlands. The historical fact that the English colony of Suriname was exchanged with New Amsterdam (which later became New York) in 1667, is indicative for the way large swathes of land that were inhabited by non-white indigenous and enslaved peoples became subject

of colonial trade-offs. For Suriname, three hundred and twenty years of European colonialism have resulted in the presence of large African and South Asian communities in the Caribbean country. Having gained formal independence relatively recently (in 1975), British and Dutch colonial politics have shaped many aspects of socio-political and cultural life. This paper investigates the ways in which African and South Asian communities have become part of a racialized schema imposed by a system of white supremacy under colonialism.

To make my argument, I perform a case study through which I analyze two statues in the capital city of Paramaribo. Firstly, I will problematize Kwakoe, a statue in the heart of the centre of the city, representing the abolition of slavery, which de facto occurred in 1873. Secondly, I come to terms with a statue named Baba and Mai, which represents the arrival of South Asian contracted labourers after 1873. Both statues, as I will argue, importantly omit white Dutch colonial responsibility for the enslavement of African people (in the case of Kwakoe) and the ongoing oppressive conditions that were operative on the plantations (in the case of Baba and Mai).

I argue that a wilful obfuscation of Dutch wrongdoing stems from a sustained dynamic of perpetuating an seemingly innocent white Dutch self which is intricately linked to a Dutch systemic politics that sidelines

Surinamese collective memories so as to not stir up a constructed notion of "the good Dutch" at the expense of both African and South Asian peoples in the Surinamese context. These groups, then, are left with both an embodied sense of inferiority, as well as with an inculcated perception of the other group as inferior, which I believe stems from a racializing Dutch politics of divide-and-conquer. These discourses developed after slavery was abolished, when the formerly enslaved African people left these sites of colonial terror. The Dutch felt obliged to ensure new labour forces, which resulted in recruitment practices in the former Dutch colony of the East Indies, and in the former colony of British India.

A main reason why a revision of Dutch colonial history is important because it opens up often negated issues of racialization in received Dutch historiography and contemporary society. In fact, the category of race, and, subsequently, the process of racialization are largely and passionately denounced both in the Netherlands (Wekker 2016; Nimako and Willemsen 2011) and, through its colonial domination, remains under-theorized in Suriname. Therefore, this paper aims to recenter race as a fundamental social marker (Yancy 2008, 2018; Mills 1998; Crenshaw 2016; Essed and Goldberg 2002; DiAngelo 2018) that unfortunately continues to shape hierarchical race relations.

Historical framework

In this section I briefly sketch the period of arrival of African captives and South Asian contacted labourers in Suriname. As noted above, Suriname became a Dutch colony in 1667, but in previous decades the Surinamese coast was already visited by Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Scottish colonial conquerors.

In their account of the Atlantic slave trade, Nimako and Willemsen detail the considerable efforts that the relatively small country of the Netherlands has made in mass abductions of African captives who were taken to the Americas. They note that: "between 1600 and 1650 the Netherlands replaced Britain as the second major transatlantic transporter; the figure for this period are as follows: Portugal (439,500), Netherlands (39,900) and Britain (23,000)" (Nimako and Willemsen 2011, 19). In the next period they mention, the numbers are as follows: for 1651-75 were Britain 115,200; France 5,900; Netherlands 59,500; Denmark 200; Portugal 53,700 (19). Postma writes:

> The spread of cultivation in the 1600s stimulated the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade dramatically. After sugar production became successful in Brazil, the Dutch sought to dominate the industry by capturing northern Brazil in 1630, which got them started in the traffic. Although the Portuguese re-

gained all of Brazil a few decades later, the Dutch remained active in the slave trade. Some of the planters who had cooperated with the Dutch fled Brazil and settled in the Caribbean, where they helped to establish sugarcane cultivation. (2003, 12)

Scholars critical of dominant, and sometimes apologetic nationalist historiographies about the slave trade are summarized by Nimako and Willemsen, a summary which frames the analysis that will follow in this paper:

Europe was the location of ideas, design, planning and innovations in slavery and the slave trade; Africa was the source of banditry, abduction and the captivity of vulnerable peoples (Rodney 1974); the Caribbean and the Americas were the sites of production by enslaved labour (James 1980); and Europe again was the destination of the consumption of the goods produced by the enslaved (Williams 1994). All elements of this network of nations and international relationships were irrepressibly racialized (Banton 1977; Miles 1982). (2011, 3)

In total, it is estimated that the Dutch captured 501,400 enslaved Africans in the period between 1519 and 1867 (Nimako and Willemsen 2011, 28). Many of these enslaved people were taken to the plantations in Suriname, the number of which grew to 564 in 1827, of which most produced sugar, coffee, and cotton (Nimako and Willemsen 2011, 69).

Importantly, I would like to stress that as in many other parts of the colonized world, rebellions against the terror on colonial plantations were widespread in Suriname. Many enslaved people were able to flee the plantations and reach the interior Dutch colony, where Marron villages were founded, which functioned as continuing sites of resistance. In one of the few accounts by an Afro-Surinamese anti-colonial activist, Anton de Kom narrates elaborately about the atrocities perpetrated by the Dutch, and subsequent acts of resistance that were ongoing. His text Wij Slaven van Suriname (We Slaves of Suriname), will be published in English in 2019.

To exemplify the atrocities that were perpetrated by the white Dutch colonial authorities, the following narrative by de Kom is indicative:

> Only against the death penalty the Dutch seemed to have reservations. Or rather, the colonial government began to buy those who were sentenced to death from their masters. The death sentence was then overturned to lifelong forced labour in the public works. Mindful of the saying: "my hand is cruel, but my heart is gentle," they first cut off the tongue of those punished, after which they castrated them, and branded the Dutch coat of arms on their cheeks. In this condition they were then forced to work in chains for the rest of their lives. (1934, 58-59) (My translation)

This example shows that the punitive practices of the Dutch authorities did not deviate much from those employed by the plantation owners. Again, it was as a result of a rigid calculation of keeping profits as high as possible, that enslaved people were to be kept alive and put to work, than to receive a death penalty – hence the conviction to forced labour. The branding of the coat of arms served the purpose of, on the one hand, having a sign of recognition in case enslaved people fled the plantations of forced labour camps to join the Marron groups who were living in the interior. On the other hand, the branding arguably was intended to serve as a permanent reminder of possession, or subjugation as an item of property— the fundament of the slave system. The memories of the days of slavery were transmitted intergenerationally, and in the school system that de Kom was part of, only a certain version of Dutch and Surinamese history was to be remembered. Yet, the stories of escaped Afro-Surinamese continued to be a vivid reminder of colonial conditions, juxtaposing the official narratives.

As with slavery, the Dutch organizers and operators of plantations did not have to invent a new system themselves to be able to proceed with profiteering in their colonies. For centuries, black bodies had been imported from Africa, but after the abolition of slavery, they could follow the example of their British counterparts to lure and import brown bodies to work the plantations. Brit-

ish contractors had been successful in the process of "recruiting" South Asian labourers, and send them onto ships to many British colonies. And so, British and Dutch colonial authorities made an agreement to ensure the steady import of humans to the colony of Suriname. On 5 June 1873 the first ship carrying South Asians arrived in Suriname, marking the period of arrival of in total 34,304 people (Choenni 2016, 47). The system of indentured labour with regard to the colony of Suriname lasted from 1873 until 1916, until pressure from Indian nationalists banned the recruitment of labourers altogether. Strident criticism of Indian labour conditions in Southern Africa— expressed by Indian lawyer and future independence advocate Mohandas K. Gandhi—led to the realization among many observers that the system was degrading and shameful. One of India's most prominent scholars at the time, G.K. Gokhale stated that: "the system is monstrous, inherently unjust, based on deceit and upheld by violence....a stain for every country, which tries to condone it" (Qtd in De Klerk 1953, 19).

Historians have devoted much attention to the working conditions of indentured labourers on the plantations, putting less emphasis on the actual recruitment process in British India. The widely-held belief that North-Indian labourers were contracted voluntarily and possessed comprehensive knowledge about conditions and consequences, does not, however, correlate with many experiences by contract labourers, as Tinker (1974, 165),

Emmer (1986, 187-207) Choenni,(2003, 20-53; 2009, 108-123), and Bhagwanbali (2010, 61) argue.

Having arrived in Suriname, it should be stressed that the same slave-owning planters were now leading the plantation on which Asian indentured labourers were serving their contract. Crucially, they were subjected to a series of new measures that would ensure their obedience and that they would stay put. One could not choose to leave the plantation without a written permission. As regards these so-called punitive sanctions, Hoefte (qtd. in Choenni 2016, 450) argues:

> The punitive sanction referred to a criminal system which was designed to have control over the contracted labourers. Those who refused work were handed several kinds of punishment, and often their wages were withheld. Also, the contracted labourers were not allowed to leave the plantations without permission during working days; for this they needed a leave-pass issued by the employer. Not only were harsh punishments applicable to offences and crimes, but this also applied to "laziness," and refusal to work, demolishing machines, tools, or other objects on the plantation, and stealing. It was also punishable to use vulgar or insulting language uttered towards seniors. (Hoefte 1987: 62; Hoefte 1998: 203-204)"

The punitive sanction was only abolished after the Second World War, as stated by Choenni: "The punitive

sanction remained in place in Suriname until the 8 September 1947 ordnance, and was abolished on 8 September 1947 (Gouvernementsblad nr. 140)" (2016, 450).

Choenni does acknowledge that after the abolition of slavery, a particular colonial mentality persisted. In this regard, he is agreeing with de Kom, who writes in We Slaves from Suriname: "After the abolition of slavery owners of the plantations and their manjhas (representatives) remained in place. They seldom developed new ideas concerning labour relations, and the legal position of the workers. This is why the old notions about slavery continued to exist even after its abolition" (Qtd. In Choenni 2016, 452).

Despite the continued subjugating methods that affected all racial groups who were subordinated under the white Dutch rulers, a separate historical development of cultural groups seems to surface, exemplified by commemorative practices, to which I turn now.

Critical notes on statues addressing colonial history

In this section, I will analyze and bring into conversation the two statues mentioned in the introduction. I touched upon Anton de Kom's text We Slaves of Suriname, and laid bare some elements that have forged Afro-Surinamese, and Hindustani colonialism. It became obvious, that

the year 1873 was a watershed moment in Surinamese history, a moment which ended the system of slavery on the one hand, and which marked the beginning of Hindustani migration to Suriname. The remainder of this paper seeks to clarify how two prominent statues that mark the abolition of slavery and the arrival of Hindustani, represent a larger mnemonic dynamic of ongoing affective dissonance between Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani. Central will be the question that arises from the alleged tension between the two works of art, by engaging in an analysis of the statues themselves, and a critical discourse analysis narratives that emerged after the two statues were erected.

On 1 July 2013, Antillean, Surinamese, and Dutch commemorations were organized to mark the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863. One hundred and fifty years after the official abolition of slavery and forty years after gaining its formal independence, the former Dutch colony of Suriname, in its official narratives, display a multitude of cultures, ethnicities and languages, proudly stating the uniqueness of its diversity. Underlying the vast array of racial diversity, however, contrasting and conflicting narratives emerge in Surinamese public life and versions of its history. The nation-state, which in its official historiography underlines a history of a three hundred and twenty years of colonial exploitation, is—from the perspective of unravelling national identity formation and colonial entanglements—an entity laden

with many layers of cultural histories, intertwined with its respective racial groups . A prime object that is purportedly symbolizing Suriname's national history is a statue that was erected in a central location of its capital city Paramaribo. The bronze image of Kwakoe (Fig.1) is one of few objects in Suriname that has been actively elevated to a national symbol, being depicted on official documents and websites, appropriated to attempt to visualize a national identity.

In Surinamese society, however, the statue of Kwakoe is perceived very differentially, because diverse cultural perceptions by the two largest racial groups in Suriname, Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani, complicate the very construction of a unified national identity. Although the perceived national symbol of Suriname is a vivid depiction of a former slave expressing the moment of liberation, the image evokes different emotions and connotations, most often depending on the ethnic background of the viewer. As the legacy of slavery is perceived so differently by Suriname's ethnic groups, the question, then, arises whether Kwakoe can at all function as a national symbol of unity, as a collective expression of the production of Surinamese culture. Can the symbol of the abolition of slavery be appropriated as an overarching icon of 'national identity'?

Figure 1. Kwakoe Statue in Paramaribo, Suriname. (source: Wikipedia Creative Commons)

In Figure 1 the statue of Kwakoe is displayed. I first want to highlight one aspect of the visual image, namely the facial expression of Kwakoe. What is striking, is the way the statue is made to look towards a point above him, which is odd, to say the least. To portray the

liberation of an enslaved person, representing the end of formal slavery that lasted more than two hundred, years in Suriname, in this particular way, points to a wilful act to deflect attention from the social conditions that were part of the system of slavery. A vague perception towards a point in the sky, I contend, evokes a connotation of transcendence, of a spiritual salvation, rather than a political foregrounding of ending the material conditions of owning black bodies, let alone the fact that colonialism continued to be sustained for another hundred years after the abolition of slavery.

From its central location in the capital city, the image of Kwakoe, since its erection on 1 July 1963, began to exert its influence and representational force upon all of Suriname. The construction of this national symbol, however, never ceased to stir up controversy, unease and outright opposition. The history and powerful legacy of slavery produce ambivalent cultural connotations: from sentiments ventilating freedom to the commencement of the period of *indentured labour*, which perpetuated the colonial plantation economy, whilst dividing the nation culturally.

Depictions of the statue are – apart from the national flag of Suriname- among the most widely reproduced symbols of Surinamese national identity formation, state-run, rather than collectively perceived. Contrastively, the following critical perspective on the matter

should shed more light on its interpretations and cultural connotations among members of the Hindustani community in Suriname.

Over the years, the Indian-Surinamese or *Hindustani* population would surpass the Afro-Surinamese in numbers, adding to the cultural conflict that was carefully monitored and, according to many contemporary Surinamese analysts, even promoted by the Dutch authorities in line with the political strategy of divide-and-conquer. Moreover, in contrast to their African counterparts, Asian immigrants were not given Dutch citizenship until 1927 (Hoefte 1998, 21). As a result, Hindu and Muslim marriages were not recognised by the Dutch, creating an even greater rift between the two largest ethnic groups, the Afro-Surinamese and the Indian-Surinamese.

From the perspective of Asian immigrants – lured to work the plantations after the abolition of slavery – the emancipatory image of the liberated enslaved person contrast with a bitter illusion. Although the system of buying, trading, and keeping enslaved people had been abandoned in 1863, Asian migrants were forced upon arrival to submit to a plantation economy and regime, only differing from the slavery era regarding factual ownership of bodies. As mentioned, plantation owners made extensive use of the so-called *poenale sanctie* (punitive sanction), enabling the Dutch to punish those

who were "insubordinate" or otherwise "unwilling to work" according to the designated standards (Hoefte 1998, 21). Many were imprisoned or received physical punishment. Liberation, for Hindustani and Javanese, resulted in a reality of repression and submission, not congruent with the image of breaking of chains that was supposedly meant to uphold salvation and freedom. As a result, the symbol of an emancipated enslaved person capturing the moment of emancipation, conflicts with plantation realities from the perception of Hindustanis and Javanese. Moreover, the associated liberation, deriving from a *constructed* national symbol, did not materialize: Asian workers complained of being treated as second-class citizens and failed to truly connect to the political heart of Surinamese society – to the only large city of Paramaribo – until the 1950s and 1960s. The statue of Kwakoe is therefore usually interpreted as symbolizing the 'emancipation' of Afro-Surinamese, marking a bitter threshold of the beginning of their own exploitation and misery. Because the history of Hindustani and Javanese Surinamese only starts in 1873, the point of reference that Kwakoe embodies, does not represent a perceived belonging or a cultural bond allegedly forging – considering official Surinamese historiography - a unified Surinamese identity.

Furthermore, the statue of Kwakoe emanates a specific gesture of liberation: holding up broken chains does address the evils of slavery, but by no means does it

fundamentally criticize *colonialism* as such. The bronze artefact was – as stated earlier – erected in 1963, a year in which many British and French former colonies had already finished their road towards formal independence. The role of the Dutch as colonial power is not questioned by the narrative Kwakoe radiates: it was decided that ownership of human beings was to be illegal, but the Dutch ownership of the land, of possessing the colony itself, was not addressed. In this regard, the political effort to highlight and commemorate Suriname's history of slavery does not reflect wider anti-colonial sentiments. Partha Chatterjee observes that "the point is that the practices that activate the forms and methods of mobilization and participation in political society are not always consistent with the principles of association in civil society" (1993, 64). Political structures in Paramaribo had been organized for a white Dutch elite primarily, and slowly – partially due to global anti-colonial endeavours – a small Creole segment was given 'a seat on the table.' It could well be argued that a civil society was not present, as political and social organizations were hardly present in a society which was largely geared towards longstanding colonial economic goals. These economic goals centered on the plantations were to be kept outside of the frame of a more fundamental liberation from economic enslavement. And so, I suggest that the statue of Kwakoe represents a moment in time, a temporal statement through which an undesirable past could be

displayed without essentially confronting Dutch colonial ownership and domination of Suriname itself. By participating in the event of commemorating 100 years of abolition of slavery, the Dutch authorities could be said to have attempted to morally cleanse their conscience by embedding crimes against humanity— i.e. the practice of slavery— into a distant past.

The Dutch colonial tactic is reminiscent of the analysis performed by Clare Anderson, stipulating that "the 'warp' of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth" (2007, 254). Under Dutch control, slavery was pushed out of the grid, and its image became a symbol for a society in a prolonged identity crisis, reiterating the question whether there can be a Surinamese national identity based on the significantly divergent perceptions of the history of slavery.

Surely, the statue of Kwakoe speaks to and continues to address the descendants of formerly enslaved Surinamese as a symbol that that informs an identity that was so brutally constructed by Dutch slavery. The nation-state of Suriname came into existence because human bondage and exploitation. Such histories painfully form the bedrock of a nation that develops culturally and multiculturally in many directions. Interestingly, Benedict

Anderson elucidates: "My point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in the view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (2006, 4). Moreover, he contends that "cultural artefacts have aroused such deep attachments," (2006, 4) indicating the immense power these symbols could carry. This, again, problematizes the prominence of the statue given Suriname's history.

An additional problematic representation of Kwakoe as symbol for national identity refers to its reflection of agency, or rather, the *lack* of agency it embodies. The figure of Kwakoe is a snapshot of the moment directly after his chains were broken. The specific act of breaking the chains – possibly and potentially symbolizing *active resistance* against slavery – is not signified by the statue. The stance could well be interpreted as a passive consequence of an invisible, almost agency-free process of liberation. The unanswered question remains: did Kwakoe liberate himself or was he liberated? Analyzed even broader: the role of the Dutch as slave-owners, as agents of repression, is not depicted by the statue. The image is but a representation of a singular African-Surinamese slave – isolated from his own racial community and indeed any collective agency. Although standing fierce and inhibiting a representational force, his solitude suggests a total lack of collectiveness. Since the statue was erected in 1963, at a time

when leading Dutch politicians were not even contemplating a roadmap towards independence, the reasoning becomes clear: a fundamental critique would have been too politically sensitive. A liberating statement that counters the Dutch crime of enslaving Africans was politically correct, but a remembrance of the victims of the system of Dutch colonialism is not addressed by the statue.

A noteworthy remark on Kwakoe's problematic representation is the name itself. In line with the tradition to name slaves after the day on which they were born, the slave was named Kwakoe, meaning Wednesday. Reminiscent of the derogatory naming of Robinson Crusoe's image of a savage (Friday), the name Kwakoe has been derived from impersonally singular moment in time, rather than from the perspective of the individual himself, or from the perspective of his community.

The history of Suriname is of such a nature that any description of an event showing a representative of one ethnic group simultaneously seems to divide the nation, its myriad of peoples, by elevating one moment in time to a supposedly pivotal and formative representation of Surinamese national identity. A highly critical moment in the history of Suriname, the First of July 1863 marked a watershed instant in time, creating cultural dialectics that are tangible even today. The crucial point and major conclusion after having scrutinized

the impact of Kwakoe, is that although a Surinamese awareness about the central role of slavery is continually being produced by the statue, the perception and importance is markedly diverse among the ethnic groups that constitute its population. With regard to collective elements within the formation of national identity, conceptual frameworks addressing cultural trauma shed more light on the discrepancies with regard to different levels of identification, more specifically the notion of a separate cultural identification by Creole Afro-Surinamese. The cardinal importance of collective identity is underlined by an observation by Ron Eyerman that:

> ...collective memory unifies the group through time and over space by providing a narrative frame, a collective story, which locates the individual and his and her biography within it, and which, because it can be represented as narrative and as text, attains mobility. The narrative can travel, and it can be embodied, written down, painted, represented, communicated and received in distant places by isolated individuals who can then, through them, be remembered and reunited with the collective. (2004, 159-169)

The diverse memories, linked to separate historical developments, are arguably a divisive factor, rather than a unifying one. Because the larger framework of a collective history of colonialism is not directly touched upon by Kwakoe, the identity formation that resonates from

the statue, is deviating from a national sense of unity.

The physical and central positioning of Kwakoe in itself reminisces of the *performative* character of objects of cultural significance, as Judith Butler argues:

> The effects of performatives, understood as discursive productions, do not conclude at the terminus of a give statement or utterance, the passing of legislation, the announcement of a birth. The reach of their signifiability cannot be controlled by the one who utters or writes, since such productions are not owned by the one who utter them. They continue to signify in spite of their authors (1993, 241).

As ethnic groups in Suriname continue to live predominantly next to one another, the realization that an overarching Surinamese national identity is not signified by the statue of Kwakoe is all but outspoken. The bitterness of past events – especially the continuation of the plantation economy by using Asian labour after the abolition of slavery – still feeds into the rift between Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani-Surinamese communities. A truly intercultural marker of national identity should *hypothetically* address all racial groups in an evenly manner. Essential for a young nation-state such as the Republic of Suriname would be to effectively incorporate all cultures into an inclusive framework. However, the question remains whether such a perspective is at all possible in a state built on slavery, the system which

has produced a society of peoples with such divergent historical backgrounds. But, as Homi Bhabha points out, it can be possible to formulate "the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives" (1994, 201). The notion of identification is absolutely fundamental: groups as diverse as Muslim Javanese, Protestant Marrons and indigenous peoples have become effectively become historically intertwined. They have been made citizens of a nation-state and are by law given rights that should in name promote equality and respectful co-existence. However, serious doubts can be expressed as to how the Surinamese nation-state practically attaches an equal value to the more than fifteen different racial groups. A figure represented by the statue of Kwakoe – racially and temporally specific – can therefore hardly be a unifying element in such complex and diverse a society. In this regard, the observation by Pierre Bourdieu that "the field of cultural production is the site of struggles..." (1993, 42), appropriately typifies Suriname, still coping with the legacy of more than three hundred years of colonial exploitation and racial divisions.

The deep attachment in the case of Kwakoe continues to be felt by those who have ties with their ancestors who worked as enslaved people. A strong underlying sentiment, visible in both Suriname and in the Nether-

lands - again becomes tangible. Indicative for the division is the recent erection of a statue commemorating the immigration of Hindustani in Suriname. The statue evokes the precise time period after abolition of slavery, as is stressed by the *arrival-mode* typical of immigrants (Fig. 2), which leads me to the next section in which I discuss the statue of Baba and Mai.

Figure 2: Baba and Mai Statue in Paramaribo, Suriname. (Source: Wikipedia Creative Commons)

In Figure 2, the statue of Baba and Mai is shown. Here, I analyze how the statue conveys and produces narratives, and how it functions in a dialogue with the statue of Kwakoe. What I firstly stress here is, the way that a received Western cultural tradition of memorializing people in bronze, fixes a narrative in a specific spatio-temporal framework. In contrast to a common circular vision on time itself –stemming from Hinduism - the fixing of temporality in the form of a statue which commemorates a moment of arrival, forecloses, I believe, a critical and ever-changing perception of a particular event. Generations of Hindustani may view, and a contemporary decolonizing turn among some does indicate, that versions of history change and that an event like the arrival period of Hindustani in Suriname, should not be cemented in a single, static structure with very specific cultural and political messages.

What is key, is that a profound cultural split –statue-wise— has effectively been created, enhancing the divergent cultural signification processes of the Kwakoe-statue. The Hindustani statue in this sense conflicts with, and simultaneously sidelines Kwakoe's national identitarian symbolism. Baba and Mai, as they are represented, are in a similar fashion as Kwakoe, separated from the colonial plantation context. The moment it is supposed to depict, concentrates the isolated duo into a world that is—like Kwakoe—not contextualized at all, other than by the text underneath the statue,

which, translated, says— '5 June 1873 – 5 June 1993 Monument of the Hindustani immigration. Inaugurated on Saturday 4 June 1994 by the foundation Hindustani immigration. "where I am well, that is where my fatherland is"'. There is no connection whatsoever with colonialism, and one could, viewed as an outsider, even assume that the two people were random travellers who sought a new "fatherland" and may have found that in Suriname. The elision of working conditions, of structural subjugation, of being kept in isolation to be a mere workforce to produce goods for the European market, the statue can said to be as potent as a contemporary and common Dutch politics of colonial amnesia. Also, it seems as if the two persons who arrived from one of the poorest regions of the colony of British India, representing the Hindustani labourers, were rather well-fed and looked seemingly satisfied, given the facial expressions that were sculpted. The statue, I argue, is an indication of a Hindustani attempt not to tread on eggshells, not to stir any trouble, not to rock the boat of a perceived status quo. The question arises what status quo is being adhered to: I believe no critical element was added, so as not to provoke Afro-Surinamese sentiments as Hindustani were among those who replaced the formerly enslaved Afro-Surinamese people, who for more than two hundred years had toiled on the hated plantations. Yet what is not represented often emerges precisely because of its elision. And the rise of recent decolonial awareness, which can be seen both in Suriname and the Nether-

lands, powerfully disrupts the image of the "satisfied" de-contextualized workers that Baba and Mai seem to represent. Yet what is important is to note that in a discursive context in which state-sanctioned iconic statues can prevail and arguably dominate –at least visually and consequently narratively— public life, the two figures represented as Baba and Mai, instil in those arriving in Suriname in the post-slavery era (Hindustani, Javanese, Chinese, and other indentured labourers) a false historical framework. Analysis conducted on stories about the ways labourers were lured to leave South Asia, tell a very different story. In a recent book that highlight voices of Hindustani and those left behind paint a picture that starkly contrasts with the image radiated by Baba and Mai. The following examples are excerpts from Bidesia folk songs composed in South Asia and Suriname, respectively (Majumdar 2010, 22).

The first text is a poem that was obtained by folklorist Ramnesh Tripathi, who, according to the research done by the Bidesia team that wrote the collection, had witnessed the departure of a train from Jaunpur to Prayag (Allahabad). He witnessed "three or four women who were also going to Calcutta. As soon as the train started moving they started singing and crying. I recorded the song being sung by them. It went like this" :

> Puruba se aai reliya pachhun se jahajiya
> Piya ke ladi lei gai ho.
> Reliya hoi gar moi sabatiya piya ke ladi leigai ho
> Deswa deswa bharmaiwai uhai paiswai bairi ho

Bhukhiya na laagai piasiya na laagai humke mohiya lagai ho
Tohri dekhiye suratiya humke mohiya laagai ho
Ser bhar gohuwa baris din khaibai piya ke jaibe na debe ho
Rakhbe ankhiya hajurwan piya ke jai na debai ho.

(The train came from the east and the ship came from the west
And took my husband away
Railway has become my co-wife who has taken my husband away
Rail is not my enemy, ship is not my enemy, money is not my enemy
Which makes my husband go from country to country
I have no hunger, I have no thirst, I feel very loving towards him
When I see his face I feel very affectionate
I will make one seer of wheat last one year but I won't let my husband go away
I will keep him in front of my eyes and not let him go away)" (Majumdar 2010, 22)

The following poem is I believe indicative for powerful narratives that have lingered for generations among Hindustani in Suriname. Again, I wish to outline that hunger and poverty was a prime reason to leave the Ganges-delta, evoking imagery that fundamentally deviates from the well-fed migrants that Baba and Mai are supposed to represent:

> Chhor aili hindustanwa babuwa, petwa ke liye
> Padli bharam mein, chhutal patna ke saharwa
> Chhut gaily ganga maiya ke ancharwa
> Na hi manli ekobaba bhaiya ke kahanwa
> Babua petwak e liye

> (We left Hindustan to satisfy our stomach
> We were convinced by the sweet words of the dalal
> (arkatiya),
> And in the process were separated from Patna and
> the Ganga river.
> We did not listen to our elders,
> But came here because of our stomach) (Kahe
> Gaile Bides 2010, 158)

These poems that have luckily survived despite a strong cultural tendency among Hindustani not to "rock the boat," alongside a sustained colonial politics geared towards subordination, emerge as more genuine narratives about the conditions of indentured labour and the demeaning conditions of working on colonial plantations. Moreover, one would envision the statue next to Kwakoe, a painful realization becomes visible: why did the Hindustani arrive in the first place? Is Kwakoe not radiating freedom, emancipation? What happened to the enslaved people who liberated themselves from the chains? And is this not a historical travesty? The power to abolish slavery was completely in the hands of the Dutch, the power to lure labourers to work on the same

plantations (again, where the punitive sanctions were applied until 1947). Yet neither of the statues alludes to those who kept Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani in subjugation. Instead, the dynamic of avoiding tension seems to do just that, as in public memory, nothing is forgotten.

Figure 3: Baba and Mai text (source: Wikipedia Creative Commons).

In Figure 3, we can see the inscription underneath the statue of Baba and Mai. A critical remark about the specific form of the alleged quote should be made here. By carving a text in italics, one is tempted to assume that the message, in English translation "where I am well, that is where my fatherland is," is a fictive spoken or written quote by one of the two persons who are depicted. However, the words are Mohandas K. Gandhi's, and have been added to the text underneath the statue without any reference. It is particularly controversial, because Mahatma Gandhi became increasingly critical towards migration from the colony of British India, which resulted in a halt in recruitment practices by arkatiyas. Although Mahatma Gandhi was in contact with some Hindustani leaders in Suriname, the broader political goal ending the decades-long emigration disrupts the attempt to forge a positive migration narrative aimed at Hindustani in Suriname.

Finally, a critical decolonial intervention urges me to juxtapose the positive image of Baba and Mai with findings by Hira and Bhagwanbali, summarized by Choenni, who affirms that Bhagwanbali has described forty rebellions that occurred during the so-called contract era:

> Collective resistance. Apart from these individual acts of resistance, a remarkable number of collective acts of resistance have been carried out during the era of contract era. Considering the collective

> acts of resistance, it shows that one should not only consider the Koloniale Verslagen (colonial reports). This is proved by Bhagwanbali's valuable 2011 study. He has described forty rebellions, while in the Koloniale Verslagen; only a few uprisings are reported as being collective acts of resistance. (...) (Bhagwanbali 2011: 23; Hira 1983: 196-215). (2016, 588)

Importantly, the first of such rebellions occurred only weeks after the first ship carrying Hindustani, the *Lalla Rookh*, arrived in Suriname: "The first uprising already occurred on 22 July 1873 on the plantation Goudmijn" (Choenni 2016, 589). The notorious killings at the Mariënburg plantation, quelling a strike and subsequent uprising in 1902 resulted in: "...24 deaths. In total 117 shots were fired at the workers[1]. (Bhagwanbali 2011: 100-125; Choenni 2016, 604).

These deaths, a result of structural colonial oppression on the Dutch plantations, are a continuous pattern that binds the underlying discourses of often hidden atrocities that should be taken into account when critical analyses are made of both the statues of Kwakoe and Baba & Mai.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have laid bare some of the problematic issues that arise from the 'national statue' Kwakoe, as

well as problematized some issues that arise from the statue Baba and Mai. The statues are important symbols for Afro-Surinamese and Hindustani, respectively, and produce questions on how the 'colonial past' is being memorialized. It is obvious that elision and avoidance of colonial contexts as well as contemporary embodiments of the collective traumatic past are issues that emerge and those issues are to be theorized in a very specific way, as the complex history of Suriname urges us to rethink received theories on memory, and colonialism. I hope I have given the impetus to do so, so that we can continue to critique and transform our contemporary colonized world into a globality of bold voices daring to speak truth to power.

Notes:

1. The events of the Mariënburg uprising are depicted in a 2013 film titled *Het Geheim van Marënburg – Cry of a Cursed Plantation*, for a trailer see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4JC0nhye30

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Negotiating Borders of the Indian Diasporic Identity

Kavita Malstead

> Diaspora is spreading of the seed when planted in different parts of the world, absorbs unique characteristics from the local soil. Every story about the Diaspora thus becomes a unique context, a coordination of space, time and experience, which someday will collectively tell the whole story of a Diaspora.
>
> ~ Pradeep Anand

Introduction: Signifying Culture

When I first moved to America from India in 2013, I took a job working morning shifts at Chick-fil-A. Each morning, I was in charge of making biscuits. In a frenzy to make enough for the steady stream of morning cus-

tomers, I would sometimes make too much before the 11 a.m. cut off time that signaled the switch from biscuits to sandwich buns. On these occasions, I was told to empty my uncooked trays of biscuits into the trash. Horrified, I asked if there was any way to save them. "No," the manager told me, without further explanation, "You must throw them away." The excessive waste did not end there. Moving from the breakfast to the lunch menu, I sliced tomatoes and peeled apart lettuce layers. I was told to toss the two top and bottom slices of each tomato. If the lettuce leaves were too small, I had to throw those in the trash too.

The idea of throwing so much food away without a second thought stunned me. In India, millions of people were starving, and could live on the food I was forced to toss. Treating perfectly good food as disposable was a cultural practice I had never before encountered. Through my experience working at Chick-fil-A, my eyes were opened to America's nonchalant policy of waste. So different from the culture I had come from, where everything was preserved, every scrap of food eaten and used, food became a signifier for ideological differences between India and America, and signaled the beginning of a long and ongoing process of evaluation concerning the cultural values and practices of both countries. This process has allowed me to position myself within the cultures of both America and India, often leading to hybrid cultural practices and principles in my own life.

Food acts in a similar fashion in the fictional lives of Jhumpa Lahiri's characters in *Interpreter of Maladies*. A short story collection documenting the experiences of Indian migrants to America, Interpreter of Maladies uses food as a medium through which to discover the intersecting cultural spaces the characters encounter. "A Temporary Matter" uses mealtimes in the quiet of candlelight to illumine a couple's past of tragedy, revealing points of similarity and difference that become a metaphor for the Indian diaspora. In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", food reinforces cultural cohesion while simultaneously crossing boundaries of nations to transcend binary categories of identity based on culture of origin. "Mrs. Sen's" expresses the ways in which food acts a catalyst for cultural hybridity, leading to the potential for change and individual agency. Although food plays a less significant role in "This Blessed House", it remains a tool for characters to delineate cultural difference. Thus, food becomes a lens through which to look at aspects of transmigration, transculturation and diaspora.

Transcending the boundaries of a singular culture can prove challenging. For transmigrant individuals, this requires a grappling with the cultures of the countries both newly entered into and left behind. What takes shape in the midst of this struggle is a hybridization, an ongoing formation and reformation of identity, hanging in the narrow space between two recognized cultural spheres. Globalization as a recent world phenomenon has led to

an increase in migration, facilitating interactions between people of different cultures, ethnicities and geographical locations. As migrants collide with differing world views, customs and cultures, they must reevaluate their identities in the midst of an ever more cosmopolitan world. Interrogating the question of identity formation among the Indian diaspora, this paper focuses on Bengali immigrants who have made their home in the United States. Basing my investigation on *Interpreter of Maladies* by Indian migrant author, Jhumpa Lahiri, I will use these stories as case studies to analyze the experiences of the Indian migrant population. Through *Interpreter of Maladies* and its engagement with food as a cultural signifier, I hope to come to an understanding of identity that necessitates the dismantling of binaries such as Self/Other, Colonizer/Colonized and East/West which support essentialist understandings of cultural and diasporic identity, by revealing the arbitrary nature of such binaries in the first place. This paper will endeavor to reveal the potential of transcultural individuals, who, caught in the in-betweenness of culture, are able to deconstruct barriers separating seemingly distinct peoples, cultures and countries through writing about the experiences of their diaspora, making explicit the process of hybridity.

Theoretical Triangulations

Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, working in conjunction with Mary Louise Pratt's notion of autoethnography and Stuart Hall's understanding of diasporic

identity, constitute the grounding theories for my paper. Bhabha's key theory of hybridity takes on particular significance in conversation with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, where Orientalism gives rise to binary systems such as West/East, Dominant/Submissive and Self/Other (Said 1979, 2). Hybridity works as a counter to these binary structures, where it can be understood as constituting the liminal space existing in-between the borders of dichotomies (Bhabha 1994, 3). The slash between Self and Other denotes "that from which something begins its presencing", rather than the point at which something stops, meaning that aspects of the Self can be found in the Other, and vice versa (7). For Pratt, the term "contact zone" replaces Bhabha's hybridity, where it is defined as the "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 1992, 4). The contact zone is therefore a meeting place of culture where individuals encounter "identity friction" and must choose what to do when confronted in this manner (4). When considering cultural identity and its specific location, Bhabha and Pratt theorize that culture can be found in this hybridized space of the contact zone, where cultural difference is negotiated between the borders of established identities (Bhabha 1994, 19).

Hall's discussion of diasporic identity relies on two potential definitions of this word, the second one incom-

prehensible without taking hybridity into account. The first definition provides an essentializing yet powerful idea of identity as rooted in a particular past, while the second forwards a non-essentializing understanding of identity built upon diasporic differences as well as points of similarity (Hall 1994, 225). This last definition of identity opens up the hybridized space in which, "cultural identity…is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (225). Hall's second definition affords members of a diaspora the ability to engage within the present, rather than tethering themselves to a particular past to which they can no longer fully be a part. Including this understanding of diaspora into one's ideology allows for engagement with the process of hybridity, ultimately revealing a transmigrant's lived experience as one which exposes the flawed nature of binary constructions, since identity is an ongoing and never ending process of "evolution and revolution" (Friedman 1998, 8).

Pratt takes autoethnography to be an artistic production which occurs in the hybridized space of which Bhabha speaks, produced by the type of diasporic identity Hall considers. This artistic production takes the form of writing, where a subordinated person seeks to represent themselves in conversation with and against colonizer representations of their people (Pratt 1992, 7). Pratt views autoethnography as a tool for subverting fixed binaries relating to identity especially as it is represented by dominant cultures (Pratt 1991, 35). Autoethnography is a form of resistance born out of the kind of grap-

pling with identity which takes place within the space of hybridity. It is from this place that an individual can challenge binary structures, understanding the arbitrary nature of such dichotomies for themselves. Thus, hybridity, autoethnography and diasporic identity work in tandem to deconstruct binaries and patterns of fixed and static thought.

Challenging Representation of the Other in "Mrs. Sen's"

"Mrs. Sen's" is a story illustrating the ways in which cultural interaction leads to a hybridized space of cultural negotiation and transcendence. The story chronicles the relationship of an American boy named Eliot and his nanny, Mrs. Sen. Of particular interest in this story is the way in which the binary of Self/Other and East/West are subverted, wherein both American and Indian characters experience subtle yet significant change in the hybridized space their friendship makes possible. According to Said, subjugated peoples of the East have historically and indeed contemporarily been represented wholly by their dominant Western counterparts, specifically in a literary context (Said 1979, 3). This mode of representation is known as Orientalism, which is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (2-3). Thus, representation of Eastern subjects as Other is used to promote cultural hegemony, where the West is seen as superior to the

East. "Mrs. Sen's" challenges this asymmetrical relationship of power by placing both Eliot, a representation of the West, and Mrs. Sen, a representation of the East, on an equal plane, where they mutually influence one another by opening up the cultural scope of their respective identities.

Mrs. Sen, newly arrived to America from Calcutta, refuses to adapt to her new American surroundings, revealed through her preparation of elaborate meals each night for dinner, despite the fact that she now only cooks for herself and her husband (Lahiri 1999, 117). As a signifier of cultural roots, "food has a symbolic value for the immigrant's experience," and Mrs. Sen is able to reconnect to her home culture through the act of preparing Indian food (Caspari 2014, 246). Eliot, whose mother is a single parent unable to look after him while she works, spends afternoons with Mrs. Sen, watching intently as she sits on the floor, cutting vegetables for dinner (Lahiri 1999, 112). Eliot notices that "her profile hovered protectively over her work, a confetti of cucumber, eggplant, and onions skins heaped around her" as she tells him about times spent preparing food for weddings in India where neighborhood women "sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night" (115). Mrs. Sen's action of bending protectively over her work translates to safeguarding memories like the wedding preparation which links her to India. Her protection of her food

and therefore her culture indicates that these memories are not only dear to her, but are under threat given her new surroundings. Thus far, Mrs. Sen is engaging with American culture through resistance, choosing to cling fast to her known culture, rather than embrace that of the foreign. Brought to America by her husband, "here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me," and not through her own will, her only avenue for agency in the process of migration has been to resist her new cultural environs by holding fast to her roots (115). However, Mrs. Sen comes to realize that some level of acculturation is necessary and begins to assert her agency over the process of hybridity through negotiation of the border between Self/Other.

Not only does food signify connection, but a sort of new agency; food preparation becomes a symbolic action for hybridity (Caspari 2014, 247). It is Mrs. Sen's connection to food, at once a cultural signifier meant to reinforce ties to India, which pushes her to analyze her dichotomous thinking and affords the beginnings of cultural negotiation. Mrs. Sen loves fish as Eliot notes, "the other thing that made Mrs. Sen happy was fish from the seaside" (Lahiri 1999, 123). However, fresh fish, again a symbol of her food habits born of Indian cultural practices, is difficult to find, and Mrs. Sen must wait for Mr. Sen to get off work in order to drive her to the fish shack along the coast. Mrs. Sen does not know how to drive, and although Mr. Sen has been trying to teach her,

it is clear that she is fearful (119). Driving a car becomes a symbol of cultural difference. In India, Mrs. Sen is accustomed to having a chauffeur, and driving represents participation in an American cultural norm (113). Mrs. Sen's exaggerated fear is therefore not just about driving, but about engagement within U.S. culture. One day, Mrs. Sen desperately wants fish but cannot get a hold of Mr. Sen (133). Caught between her fear of driving and her desire for fresh fish, Mrs. Sen decides to drive to the fish shack along with Eliot, asserting her agency in the context of a new cultural space in this moment of decision.

Mrs. Sen is on the brink of reconstituting her cultural identity. She has overcome her fear of driving, a symbol of the American way of life to which she has previously been so adamantly opposed, only to crash the car on her way to getting the fish (134). Since Eliot is riding with her, she is seen as an unfit caretaker, thus ending their transformative relationship. Cut off from this life-altering relationship, the reader is uncertain as to whether or not Mrs. Sen will be able to continue to adapt to her new culture, but is also left with the assurance that she has not gone unaffected by Eliot's influence. Importantly, Eliot is just as unable to continue unchanged as is Mrs. Sen. Eliot, who watches the cultural habits of Mrs. Sen, begins to turn a critical eye on his own culture, remarking that his mother does not prepare her own food, but merely orders pizza each night (118). His experience as a single child with a single parent is not normative, and

through acting as witness to another culture embodied in Mrs. Sen, Eliot is pushed to think about how his cultural practices are not universally shared (Caspari 2014, 250). His character too remains unresolved, as the final sentence of the story leaves him on the phone with his mother while he "looked out the kitchen window, at gray waves receding from the shore, and said that he was fine," a state of being we know to be false (Lahiri 1999, 135). In Eliot's lie to his mother that he is fine, the reader comes to understand that he feels a sense of loss at his separation from Mrs. Sen.

The meaningful cultural interaction between Mrs. Sen and Eliot challenges the common cultural discourse in which the West dominates the East, by stepping outside the dominance/submission dichotomy. Through their interactions, both characters engage within the contact zone, where they influence each other. Eliot as a member of American culture, does not impose his lifeways on Mrs. Sen. Instead, he takes the passive role of observing her cultural practices. Along with food which acts as a catalyst, Eliot is Mrs. Sen's point of entry to American culture, as she finds herself unable to completely resist contact with her Western surroundings. In return, Mrs. Sen affords Eliot a window into aspects of Indian culture, causing him to evaluate his own cultural positioning. For Mrs. Sen and Eliot then, the Other no longer remains a distinct entity, but shares aspects of the Self. Their relationship proves the intertwined, fractal

structure of transculturalism and the complex encounters with the Other, leading to a hybridized identity in each of them (Gilroy 1993, 4).

Hybridity in "This Blessed House"

Transmigrant responses within the contact zone are as various and as diverse as the individual experiences are themselves. Expanding on the concept of hybridity in relation to *Interpreter of Maladie*s, it is seen as a dismantling of the Self/Other dichotomy where Lahiri's characters are in the process of "(re)constructing their subjectivity, (re)asserting their agency, or negotiating their identities through either silence, resistance, negotiation, acculturation or assimilation" (Bahmanpour 2010, 44). Engagement within the contact zone can result in a complete rejection of, or a total assimilation into another culture, and may not represent both cultures equally. Hybridity is a grappling with identity that can take any number of forms and is in constant motion (Nair 2015, 141-142). Some of these ways of engaging with hybridity can be found in the story "This Blessed House", a piece about a newlywed couple, Sanjeev and his wife, Twinkle. While Twinkle, a second generation immigrant, has no problem engaging within the contact zone, effortlessly negotiating between her two cultural identities, Sanjeev, a first generation immigrant much like Mrs. Sen, refuses to engage with the culture he deems as Other.

Instead of food as a cultural signifier, religion comes to represent cultural identity in "This Blessed House". Twinkle and Sanjeev are in the process of moving into a new house, and discover Christian paraphernalia as they unpack (Lahiri 1999, 136). This house moving can be read as a movement into America, where the couple cannot help but come into contact with cultural aspects of the West (Bahmanpour 2010, 47). Pratt argues that while subjugated peoples often do not have a choice as to whether or not they are exposed to the culture of the dominant group, such as when Twinkle and Sanjeev find the Christian relics, they can to some extent decide what aspects of this culture they will integrate into their own practices (Pratt 1992, 6). Upon finding the first object, "a white porcelain effigy of Christ," Sanjeev tells Twinkle, who is reluctant to throw it away, "We're not Christian" (Lahiri 1999, 136-137). In response Twinkle shrugs, "'No, we're not Christian. We're good little Hindus.' She planted a kiss on the top of Christ's head" (137). Twinkle's seemingly contradictory statement and subsequent action reveals that she is operating in a hybridized space, where she is unafraid of accepting aspects of the West. She maintains that she is Hindu at the same time as asserting her love for the Christ figure she has found.

Sanjeev is not so open to accepting objects representing American culture. When Twinkle finds a poster portrait of Christ he says, "'Now look. I will tolerate, for now, your little biblical menagerie in the living room. But I re-

fuse to have this…displayed in our home."' (139). Here, Sanjeev is engaging within the contact zone through resistance, refusing to engage with the relics signifying a culture other than his own. However, cracks in his defensive barrier begin to appear as he realizes he must negotiate between cultures in order to remain content with his marital partner, "He was getting nowhere with her, with this woman whom he had known for only four months and whom he had married, this woman with whom he now shared his life" (146). At the end of the story, Twinkle finds a "solid silver bust of Christ" in the attic of their house, which she asks Sanjeev to carry into the living room (156). Although Sanjeev "hated that it was in his house, and that he owned it," he negotiates his urge to refuse keeping the bust in his home by engaging within the contact zone through silence (157). The story leaves Sanjeev as he "pressed the massive silver face to his ribs, careful not to let the feather hat slip, and followed her," for once refraining from arguing with Twinkle (157).

"This Blessed House" suggests that to engage with hybridity, there needs to be some form of negotiation between cultures. Although Sanjeev and Twinkle have both been thrown into the contact zone where they are exposed to aspects of Western culture inside their own home, only Twinkle engages in the process of hybridity as she is able to positively negotiate between these cultural religious objects and her own religious beliefs

as a Hindu. Whereas Sanjeev remains opposed to the religious artifacts hidden in the house, Twinkle opens herself up to their mystery, enjoying their foreignness instead of rejecting them for being so. In so doing, Twinkle and other subordinated individuals are constructing their counter to dominant representations of themselves by refusing to remain entirely Other. It is important to note that Sanjeev too, seems to be opening himself up to hybridity. His engagement within the contact zone shifts from one of complete resistance to one of silence. Like "Mrs. Sen's", "This Blessed House" remains open ended, suggesting that the process of reevaluating and reasserting identity in an ongoing and never ending process.

Part One: Diasporic Identity in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

 "Identity is not as transparent or as unproblematic as we think" (Hall 1994, 222). Complicating understandings of diasporic identity, Stuart Hall provides two different ways in which cultural identity can be defined. The first definition asserts the notion of a shared identity, an underlying essence to a group of people (223). Finding cultural identity involves excavating that unchanging meaning to which members of a diaspora belong (223). This understanding of cultural identity as static and rooted in the past can be seen in Lahiri's story, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine". The story opens with the civil war

raging in Pakistan, 1971. East Pakistan, soon to become known as Bangladesh, is struggling for independence (Lahiri 1999, 23). Meanwhile, across the world in America, Lilia's Indian parents and their East Pakistani friend, Mr. Pirzada, watch the turbulent birth of this nation on the evening news as they eat Indian food prepared by Lilia's mother (24).

Lilia's father is adamant that she understand the differences between her Indian family, and Mr. Pirzada, a distinction which stems from India's history of decolonization. Immediately upon gaining independence from Britain, India was carved up into different nation-states. Lilia's father dramatically describes to his uncomprehending daughter, "'One moment we were free and then we were sliced up,' drawing an X with his finger on the countertop, 'like a pie'" (25). India became Pakistan and now Pakistan too, is breaking apart. This experience of dispersal, revealed in Lilia's father's metaphor of a pie, relates to "the ways transnational groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality and language," and to an uncovering of the history of the term "diaspora" as first relating to the exile of the Jews from Israel (Edwards 2003, 12-13). This understanding invokes the forceful movement of peoples across cultural and physical borders due to external pressure which makes a nation unable to support its citizens (13). Perhaps it is this displacement which brings Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's family together, merging understandings of diasporic identity.

Lilia's family at first sees only the differences between themselves and Mr. Pirzada. Mr. Pirzada is Muslim and therefore was relegated to East Pakistan when India was carved up post decolonization (Lahiri 1999, 25). Lilia's father tells her that, "during Partition Hindus and Muslims had set fire to each other's homes. For many, the idea of eating in each other's company was still unthinkable" (25). Despite this fact, Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's parents partake of meals together almost every day. Lilia notices the similarity of their actions concerning how they eat their food. She brings them chili peppers "which they liked to snap open and crush into their food" (30). As they watch the latest news coverage of the East Pakistani fight for independence, they relish in the food that reminds them of home, seemingly not realizing the ways in which food brings them together. Lilia however, notices their similarities, narrating, "Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same" (25). In her childhood innocence, Lilia does not understand the differences of nation which her father is so insistent on explaining.

One of the most powerful lines is this story comes in the tense days leading up to East Pakistan's emancipation. Lilia recalls, "Most of all I remember the three of them operating during that time as if they were a single person, a single body, a single silence and a single fear" (41). Despite Lilia's father's adamant insistence upon

Mr. Pirzada's identity being distinctly different from his own, in this moment where they are consumed with the events of the Pakistani civil war, both Indians and soon to be Bangladeshi, find themselves acting as "a single person" (41). Ultimately, the fact that the East Pakistani is Muslim and the Indians Hindu, does not matter. Their customs centered around food, language and humor serve to bring them together, becoming individuals whose sense of identity has expanded to encompass one another, even as their representative countries ally together to fight for independence. "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" relays Hall's first definition of diaspora as one which acknowledges similarity within members of a diaspora. Although fractured, East Pakistan was once a part of India, and it is this shared past which Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada return to as they gather together over a matter of mutual concern for the world events taking place. The borders of identity have merged among this group of friends just as the borders of their homelands are thrown into question by war.

Part Two: Diasporic Identity in "A Temporary Matter"

Though Hall acknowledges that his first conception of identity involves an important "act of rediscovery despite being destroyed, suppressed and overlaid by colonialization," he contends that representations of such a unified identity impose "an imaginary coherence on

the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all dispersed diasporas" (Hall 1994, 224). Whereas this understanding of identity proved powerful in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" by bringing together dispersed members of the India diaspora, it remains a conception of identity that is rooted in a particular past, a past to which it may not always be practical, or indeed possible, to return (224). Instead, Hall proposes a second definition of cultural identity which acknowledges deep differences as well as points of similarity between members of the same diaspora (225). Contending that "cultural identity…is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'," Hall explains that identity is not rooted to a fixed and stable past to which a diaspora must "make some final and absolute return" (226). Lahiri's opening story in *Interpreter of Maladies* titled "A Temporary Matter", struggles with these two contending ideologies of diaspora. Unlike "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", "A Temporary Matter" finds that returning to a specific cultural past is impossible, and perhaps even undesirable given the magnitude of change experienced as time moves forward. "A Temporary Matter" thus reveals how identity is constituted in an ongoing process of evolution and revolution.

Shukumar and his wife Shoba have lost their first child, a tragedy which tears apart their marriage (Lahiri 1999, 3). Communication between them breaks down as Shukumar remarks, "The more Shoba stayed out, the more

she began to put in extra hours of work and taking on additional projects, the more he wanted to stay in" (Lahiri, 2). The death of their child has wrought changes in both of them, portrayed through their practices revolving around food. Shukumar recalls that "when friends dropped by, Shoba would throw together meals that appeared to have taken half a day to prepare, from things she had frozen and bottled, not cheap things in tins but peppers she had marinated herself with rosemary, and chutneys that she cooked on Sundays, stirring boiling pots of tomatoes and prunes" (7). Now, it is Shukumar who does all the cooking, Shoba content with "eat[ing] a bowl of cereal for her dinner" (8). Just as food signifies the ways in which both Shoba and Shukumar have changed since the death of their baby, it also becomes a medium through which pathways to communication reopen.

The couple's neighbourhood is scheduled for electricity work, meaning that each evening for an hour beginning at eight o'clock, the electricity will be turned off. On the first night, Shukumar prepares rogan josh, a lamb and paprika curry for their meal by candlelight (10). Sharing their meal in the dark, something they have not done in a while since they tend to eat their meals separately, Shoba and Shukumar begin to talk to one another, revealing secrets they have kept from each other, "Somehow, without saying anything, it had turned into this. Into an exchange of confessions—the little ways they'd hurt or disappointed each other, and themselves" (18). This

nightly ritual of sharing confessions by candlelight relates to Hall's definition of diaspora as an excavation of a shared identity. Shoba and Shukumar, as a metaphor for the larger India diaspora of which they are a part, are seeking to return to the way their life was before the tragedy. Food has opened a doorway to communication through which they are able to begin reconnecting with each other, finding healing through the process.

For Shoba and Shukumar, the process of reconnection takes a twist away from a reunited return to the past. At the end of the week of scheduled power outages, Shoba reveals her last secret, "'I've been looking for an apartment and I've found one,' she said, narrowing her eyes on something, it seemed, behind his left shoulder. It was nobody's fault, she continued. They'd been through enough" (21). In response, Shukumar, too, reveals his last confession. He held his stillborn infant in the palm of his hand while Shoba was sleeping, and had known that he was a boy, something Shoba did not know. Shukumar had "promised himself that day that he would never tell Shoba, because he still loved her then" (22). Through finally reconnecting and reopening their communication, the couple realizes that they have changed to the point at which they no longer love each other in the same way, nor desire a life together. In choosing to go their separate ways, Shoba and Shukumar reveal that identity is determined through difference. Although they share a common past, they can no longer strive to re-

turn to this past, and must move on acknowledging the changes that have been wrought.

As a metaphor for diaspora, Shoba and Shukumar's story suggests an anti-essentialist understanding of identity where it is seen as complex and constituted as much on points of difference as on points of similarity (Edwards 2003, 12). Here, identity is not seen as a pure essence, but is characterized through diversity, and through the process of change. Hall acknowledges diaspora as "a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1994, 236). Diversity among diaspora challenges fixed binaries which render identity static. Indeed, differences cannot be represented through binary systems of Self/Other because, "its complexity exceeds this binary structure of representation" (228). Through an ever evolving formation and reformation of cultural identity, as seen in "A Temporary matter", members of a diaspora break down dichotomies by representing the many complex intersections of space and time that take place in the present moment.

Autoethnography in *Interpreter of Maladies*

The workings of the contact zone often manifest themselves in what Pratt calls "autoethnographic expression" (Pratt 1992, 7). A form making explicit the process of

hybridity, autoethnography emerges as an art of the contact zone, affording subordinated peoples the ability to express their own "histories and lifeways" (Pratt 1991, 37). Challenging the practice of ethnography (in which Orientalism is a subcategory), where texts are written by Westerners representing their often conquered Others, autoethnography pertains to instances when members of a subordinate group "undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (35). Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* can be seen as one such example of autoethnography, in which Lahiri seeks to give voice to her people, allowing them to tell their own stories through her fictional writing. As a member of a subjugated people group, Lahiri uses autoethnographic expression as a powerful tool to represent the Indian diaspora, often in resistance to Western representations signifying them as Other.

A particular strength of *Interpreter of Maladies* as an autoethnographic text is its form as a short story collection. Through constructing her work as such, Lahiri subverts the common reading of ethnic literature as representing the entirety of the population about whom a text is written. Presenting the reader with multiple representations of the Indian diaspora allows the reader to consider the identity formation of her characters as complex and distinctive, revealing the immigrant experience as one which challenges binarist thinking. In "Mrs. Sen's", the reader glimpses the pain of dislocation and the struggle for happiness in a foreign country, moving the charac-

ter from a place of resistance to a place of negotiation. By contrast, "This Blessed House" reveals a female protagonist who negotiates between Indian and American culture with ease, embodying a hybridized sense of self and transcending binary cultural categories. "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" affirms the power of excavating a shared cultural past among members of a diaspora by bringing dispersed individuals back together, whereas "A Temporary Matter" discloses the fact that a return to the past may not always be possible, pointing to an acknowledgement of identity as constantly in motion, operating in the present and leading to deep differences among diaspora. Through her stories, Lahiri represents multiple aspects of the transmigrant experience, revealing the fluidity of identity which constantly transcends cultural boundaries and transgresses the binary of Self/Other.

Autoethnographic texts are powerful because they make explicit the process of hybridity and "foreground the practical impossibility of claims for pure cultural absolutism or an unproblematically static, rooted cultural identity" (Brown. 2006, 689). However, autoethnographic works can only remain powerful insofar as they acknowledge their limitations. Since identity is an ongoing progression, autoethnographic books must recognize that any attempt to speak to this process involves an arbitrary cut in identity (Hall 1994, 230). Remembering that "fixed binaries…stabilize meaning and representation," there must a realization that texts which serve to shed light on diasporic identity formation, position

themselves at a certain point in the process, stopping the course in its tracks. Indeed, "meaning continues to unfold…beyond the arbitrary closure, which makes it, at any moment, possible" (230). Hall argues that while this cut in identity is needed in order to make identity meaningful, it is simultaneously subjective. This is the limitation but also the promise of autoethnographic expression—that as long as such expression represents a cut in the progression of identity (as it must), there will always be a need for continued expression, for other authors to take up the task of writing about their people, about the experiences of the contact zone, and the transformative power of hybridity.

Conclusion: Across Borders/Binaries

I reflect on the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah who writes, "By the end, I hope to have made it harder to think of the world as divided between the West and the Rest; between locals and moderns; between a bloodless ethic of profit and a bloody ethic of identity; between 'us' and 'them'"(Appiah 2006, xxi). I believe that in order to be citizens of our global community, we must cultivate respect for others and value the specific lives of each individual, made possible thBrownrough the deconstruction of binaries which delineate separation. Identity formation is not a fixed or static event. Rather, it is a process which occurs in the hybridized space between cultural boundaries, catalyzed by transnational movement across

borders in which diaspora leads to the hybridized con-
tact zone. Such an understanding of identity, revealed
through autoethnographic texts like Interpreter of
Maladies, claims that all human beings are citizens of
a world whose borders merge and overlap allowing for
transcendence of binarist thinking. As Bhabha indicates,
hybridity affords the possibility of transformation as it
creates a space for navigating new identities in a simulta-
neous process of pain and hope, signifying the promise
of new beginnings and new knowledges.

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Trauma of Colonial/Postcolonial Entanglement: Something Torn and New in Weep Not, Child

Shibaji Mridha

Published after two years of Kenya's Independence in 1964, renowned writer and critic Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's debut novel *Weep Not, Child* recreates the turbulent 1950s in colonized Kenya. This book has been mostly read postcolonially either as a resistance novel, depicting the political uprising in Kenya along with its internal ideological schism against colonial violence, or as an allegory of Kenya's course to independence. However, in this paper, I intend to establish a nexus between postcolonial theory and contemporary trauma studies, maintaining the recent postcolonial tendency of decolonizing

trauma theory. The novel exposes the trauma inflicted by the colonial settlement on the everyday, innocent colonized people like Njoroge, tracing the horrifying consequences it triggers in the lives of victims both on a personal and allegorical level. Hence, I argue how the evil of colonial ideology is not only manifested in the destruction of lives, beliefs, practices, and institutions of the native Africans but also displayed, more disturbingly, in the unsettling of the psyche of the colonized subjects. In addition, in connection with another monumental work, *Something Torn and New: Towards an African Renaissance* by Ngugi, I aim to discuss the significance of the agency of collective trauma in a postcolonial context in an attempt to both historicize and empower trauma.

Postcolonial theory has always maintained how colonial entanglement shatters and disturbs one's sense of reality and perception, forcing him/her to be at unease with one's own identity. The contemporary trauma theory, in a similar fashion, asserts that the fright and fear resulting from the traumatic experience can destroy or disorient one's sense of identity. However, unfortunately, modern trauma studies has rarely and inadequately accommodated the colonial trauma experience in its discourse. Drawing references from the prominent scholars such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o on postcolonial theory, and Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Kai Erikson, and Stef Craps on trauma studies, I intend to examine the psychic injury

of the protagonist in an attempt to understand the expansive impacts of colonial chaos. My essay is primarily informed by Stef Craps's argument of decolonizing the trauma studies, Kai Erikson's concept of collective trauma as a communal force, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's idea of re-membering/mourning in an attempt to work through the dismembered past of the colonial history. My reading of *Weep Not, Child* as a tale of trauma resulting from colonial entanglement connects Njoroge's personal ordeal with its socio-political milieu to situate itself in a collective trauma. Finally, this essay goes on arguing how the collective trauma of colonial experience can be translated into a constructive force in an act of re-membering and revisiting the traumatic past.

One cannot deny the fact that the recent trend of trauma studies is highly indebted to Holocaust studies. The pioneering figures of trauma studies, who have established it as a distinct field, such as Cathy Caruth, Ruth Leys, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, primarily focused on Holocaust victims and, to an extent, World War II, and their experiences. Instances of Eurocentric bias, parochial vision of history, and essentialization of trauma model are evident in the majority of the mainstream influential books published from the 1960s until the present. Stef Craps's insightful argument in *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* is one of the first complete book-length discussions on the urgency of decolonizing the trauma theory. He

finds the hegemonic definitions of trauma "culturally insensitive and exclusionary" (Craps 2013, 3), which should account for and respond to collective, ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence to represent the disenfranchised. He comments: "It takes for granted rather than interrogates hegemonic definitions of trauma which are not scientifically neutral but culturally specific, and which will have to be revised and modified if they are to adequately account for—rather than to (re)colonize..." (Craps 2013, 21). He continues that trauma theory should deliberately consider the specific social and political contexts in which trauma narratives are produced, and be receptive and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance which these contexts dictate. Critiquing the usual tendency of space-bound and race-bound discussions of trauma theorists, he explicates how they largely fail to live up to the promise of cross-cultural engagement. He argues:

> They fail on at least four counts: they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas (Craps 2013, 2).

As a result, trauma theory risks facilitating in the preservation of the existing injustices and inequalities in the system that it claims to eliminate. Therefore, trauma theory needs to be revised, modified, and most importantly, decolonized to adequately accommodate and embody the psychological pain inflicted on the underrepresented victims.

The problem with an exclusive and culturally insensitive trauma theory is that it fails to expose comprehensive situations of injustice and abuse, slamming the door, especially, on the Global South. According to the prevailing dominant model, racial colonialism fits neither structural trauma nor historical trauma. Craps elucidates that traditional cultural trauma research continues "to adhere to the traditional event-based model of trauma" of Europe, according to which trauma results from "a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event" (Craps 2013, 4), preferring fragmented, non-linear, anti-narrative forms of narratives, which is again very euro-centric. Drawing reference on the work of LaCapra as an example, Craps appreciates how his works bring conceptual clarity to the field of trauma theory in relation to history. At the same time, he also argues how he (LaCapra) falls short of accommodating racial trauma and its unique experience in his discussion. His key distinction between loss and absence is believed "to obscure the kind of long-term, cumulative trauma suffered by victims of racism or other forms of structural oppres-

sion, which fits neither the category" (Craps 2013, 4). In a similar vein, critiquing the "limited focus" of one of the influential books on trauma studies *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000) by Ruth Leys, critic Victoria Burrows points out that it fails to keep its promise of a comprehensive study of the history of the conceptualization of trauma. She considers the book as "a text that is premised entirely upon a Eurocentric reading solely indentured to a middle-class whiteness built on concepts of Western individualism" (Burrows 2004, 17). She, therefore, calls for a remapping of trauma theory that is not white-centric and gender-blind. The "Introduction" to the book *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* also acknowledges that trauma theory is mainly a response to the developing and changing influence of the Holocaust, at least in the West. Agreeing with Stef Craps, they assert that texts on trauma theory often "marginalize the traumatic experience of non-western cultures, assume the definitions of trauma and recovery that the West has developed are universal and often favour a distinctively modernist form in order to 'bear witness' to trauma" (Buelens, Durrant, and Eaglestone 2014, 5). Hence, the established discourse of trauma still seems inadequate to accommodate the experience of colonial trauma of the Global South. If trauma theory is truly an effort to trace the infinite shapes both of human suffering and of our responses to it, then it cannot handpick certain experiences of selective humans.

As Craps convincingly suggests, the significant contribution that a decolonized trauma theory can make to our understanding of postcolonial literature is that it "bears witness to the suffering engendered by racial or colonial oppression" (Craps 2013, 5). Hence, at this point, I would prefer to delve into the world of *Weep Not, Child* to situate the novel in the context of trauma studies in an attempt to understand the distinct trauma it unleashes, triggered by colonial coercion. This politically charged novel foregrounds the emotional and spiritual journey of a young boy, Njoroge, against the backdrop of the Mau Mau revolution that was organized against the British colonial rule. At the beginning of the novel, Njoroge is elated to know that he would be sent to school by his family. When his mother Nyokabi imparts the news to him, he wonders how his mother was able to recognize his "undivulged dream" (Thiong'o 2012, 4) of becoming an enlightened man. He sees himself "destined for something big, and this made his heart glow" (Thiong'o 2012, 41) because he believes only learning can make him contribute to his family and community. Amid the political tension and racial anxiety, Njoroge manages to continue his studies with the support of his mother, Nyokabi, and brother, Kamau. However, things start changing dramatically for him when his father, Ngotho, had a fight with Jacobo, who owned the land on which Ngotho lived, in a public meeting. Jacobo was considered as a traitor to his black community because of his controversial decision of taking the co-

lonial government's side when an all-out strike broke out in the village. When he took to the stage to urge people to go back to work, in a single moment, he "crystallised into a concrete betrayal of the people" and transformed into "the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering" (Thiong'o 2012, 62). To everyone's surprise, the hero of the hour, Ngotho rose and fought with him, leaving both of them injured. Consequently, Nogotho's family was displaced from their home, and what is worse is that he loses his job from his white master, Mr. Howlands. Ngotho was told to leave Jacobo's land despite the fact that "Jacobo found him there when he bought the land from the previous owner" (Thiong'o 2012, 65). From now on, the world Njoroge has known and dreamed of is not and cannot be the same.

The title of Part 2, "Darkness Fall", prepares one for the impending danger and atrocities lurking around in every part of the village. The uprising of Mau Mau revolution to oust colonial rule from Kenya accelerates ruthless persecution by the colonial government. Njoroge feels utterly uncomfortable when for the first time the members of his family are arrested under the curfew law. Kori, his brother, and Njeri, Ngotho's first wife, are captured by the police. While Njeri is released once the fine has been given, Kori is sent to "a detention camp, without trial" (Thiong'o 2012, 90). Earlier he was, once more, captured by the police, which he somehow managed to escape. Njoroge heard him describing the

event to his family: "We did not know where we were being taken. I feared that we might be killed. This feeling became stronger when we came to a forest and the truck in which I was slowed down" (Thiong'o 2012, 76). Njoroge's initial phase of losing his sense of reality, and consequently, his unsettling of the psyche, can be traced in his reflection of time and space that is no longer in harmony, but in chaos. He realizes that his home is now a place "where stories were no longer told, a place where no young men and women from the village gathered" (Thiong'o 2012, 90). Later, the fall out between his father and his brother, Boro, a disillusioned soldier from World War II who condemns the older generation's inactivity for the current situation, makes Njoroge more aware of the political tension and domination around him.

Njoroge, now almost a young man, is capable of understanding the full force of the chaos that has come over the land. On one hand, he is still sustained by his faith in education that will prepare him to play his big role when the time comes; on the other hand, he slowly starts losing his known perception of the world. During this time, Kamau informs him that the barber, Nganga, on whose land they built their new house, and four others have been taken from their houses three nights ago and have been "discovered dead in the forest" (Thiong'o 2012, 94). Njoroge finds it almost ridiculous, feeling almost creepy, to think that "one would never see the six men again" (Thiong'o 2012, 95). However, what finally

triggers his trauma is the day when he is picked up from Siriana Secondary School by two policemen and taken to a particular homeguard post popularly known as "the House of Pain" (Thiong'o 2012, 127). The following day he is interrogated in connection with Jacobo's murder and his involvement with Mau Mau. Upon refusal, he receives blow after blow that make his body covered with blood "where the hobnailed shoes of the grey eyes had done their work" (Thiong'o 2012, 128). He wakes up from the coma late at night, and is interrogated again. Mr. Howlands holds Njoroge's private parts with a pair of pincers and starts to press tentatively telling him "you will be castrated like your father" (Thiong'o 2012, 129). Both of Njoroge's mothers, his father and his brother, Kamau, are arrested in connection with the murder. It is true that Njoroge has always been a dreamer, a visionary. However, these experiences have appeared as "shocks that showed him a different world from that he had believed himself living in" (Thiong'o 2012, 131).

My revisiting of the plot has been deliberate in an attempt to trace the series of events and experiences that ultimately make Njoroge collapse and vulnerable, leading him to his trauma. Defying the dominant model of trauma as a consequence of a single, catastrophic event, here, in the novel, the trauma is being inflicted slowly in the psyche of the colonized through a series of temporal and spatial events, shattering one's sense of self, identity, spatiality, and vision. Having said that, one has to return to

the western concept of trauma, where it began as a discipline and later evolved, for the basic guidelines of its origin and symptoms. Cathy Caruth, in her highly influential book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* defines trauma as:

> a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (1995, 4)

She argues that trauma is much more than a pathology which cannot be defined by the event itself, but by the structure of its overwhelming experience or reception, only when it, belatedly, possesses the one who goes through it. In the same vein, Njoroge, unable to find no end, no cure for the nightmarish experiences, initially feels overwhelmed. At first, these had "a numbing effect" (Thiong'o 2012, 131) on him; therefore, he is not sure how to feel about them or how to respond to them. In the process, his mind became clear, and later fixated when "the old fear came back and haunted him" (Thiong'o 2012, 131). He, like a clinical trauma patient, feels that something is wrong with him, something is impure about him, and develops both a self-guilt and a self-negation. Blaming his friendship with Mwihaki, Jacobo's daughter, he breaks down to his mother: "It's

I who have brought all this on to you" (Thiong'o 2012, 131) and hates himself without knowing why. The pain, both emotional and physical, inflicted on him by colonial violence makes him both powerless and hopeless.

How can Njoroge ever forget what he witnessed when his father, Ngotho, was moved from the homeguard post? His father's face had been "deformed by small wounds and scars," his nose was "cleft into two" and his legs could only be "dragged" (Thiong'o 2012, 134). For four days his mouth and eyes remained shut. His father's tragic death, who was both his hero and strength, provides him with a massive final blow that disconnects him from his sense of reality. Feeling himself of an old man of twenty, he finds himself a visionless, living dead body whose "blank stare" (Thiong'o 2012, 140) frightens children in a shop from where he was fired in less than a month. Finally, Mwihaki's refusal to escape the reality with him destroys his last hope. The world has transformed into an empty place where he sees everything in a mist. His overpowering situation resembles Kai Erikson's account of trauma victim: "It [trauma] invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape—'possesses' you—and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty" (1995, 183). In the process, his sense of the known world and the unknown collapses, and his sense of the familiar and the strange breakdowns. His past, present, and future all get tangled in a weird loop, leaving

him no breathing space from the torment: "He recalled Ngotho, dead. Boro would soon be executed while Kamau would be in prison for life. Njoroge did not know what would happen to Kori in detention. He might be killed like those who had been beaten to death at Hola Camp" (Thiong'o 2012, 145). He finally loses "faith in all the things he had earlier believed in, like wealth, power, education, religion" (Thiong'o 2012, 145). He could sense that whatever constitutes his reality is falling apart. The horror, the pain and the grief that he feels are so overwhelmingly traumatic that he waits for "darkness to come and cover him" (Thiong'o 2012, 146).

However, Njoroge's trauma, springing from the fear and horror of the colonial predicament, cannot be read only as his personal tragedy. His choice of surrendering to death not only exhibits his psychic surrender but also exposes the heart of darkness of the colonial entanglement. In this regard, his individual trauma echoes the historical trauma of Kenya in the sense that they both suffer from paranoia and violence in a critical time when they are in a quest of an identity. One must remember that the novel was written during Kenya's crucial transition to independence. Ngugi's crushing ending, thus, is applicable not only to no-longer-innocent Njoroge's life but also to Kenya's future. A colonized individual's destiny is intricately connected to the colonial history; so much so that separating them would result in abstraction and distortion of both personal and collective history. In *Discourse*

on Colonialism, Aimé Césaire, one of the founding figures of postcolonial studies, powerfully evokes the pathos of "millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys" (2000, 43). Although the book, first published in 1950— long before the trauma studies became a trend— never explicitly raises the notion of trauma, it carries a similar ethos of colonial trauma. He categorically discusses how the deceptive colonialism robbed colonized societies of their essence, trampled cultures, undermined institutions, confiscated lands, smashed religions, destroyed creative expressions, and wiped out individuals' extraordinary potential. Therefore, despite the individual's unique experience, colonized subjects are intricately bound together by a shared experience and memory.

According to trauma studies, it is crucial to historicizing trauma to rethink the possibility of history and to understand our ethical and political relation to it. Even though the majority of the theorists limited their horizon to Western history, it is worth noting how they situate trauma in history in general. Viewing history as inherently traumatic that resists integration and expression, Cathy Caruth argues that a textual approach should not distract us from confronting history which is no longer straightforwardly referential. She claims that trauma can afford us unique access to history: "through the notion of trauma… we can understand that a re-

thinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (Caruth 2016, 12). On a similar note, considering trauma as a prominent feature of history, notably modern history, LaCapra argues that it is unwise to see trauma only as a purely psychological or individual phenomenon. He continues that it has crucial connections "to social and political conditions and can only be understood and engaged with respect to them" (LaCapra 2014, xi). He regrets how insufficiently historians recognize the significance of individual and collective trauma even when they write of events and processes, in which it is omnipresent, such as genocides, wars, rape, victimization, and abuse. I believe this notion is more than pertinently applicable to the history of colonization and slavery where trauma has been imprinted in the psyche, on the body, and on the land of the casualties over the centuries through subjugation and carnage.

Going back to history and *Weep Not, Child*, it is worth remembering that Ngugi also came of age, like Njoroge, during the state of emergency (1952-61) declared by the British colonial administration in an attempt to subdue Mau Mau revolution. The Gikuyu peasant movement, the nascent phase of Mau Mau, was banned in 1950, forcing its participants to go underground and to take up arms. In the process, the colonial government declared a state of emergency in Kenya in 1952, which made the situation terribly worse. This disturbing envi-

ronment is echoed at the beginning of chapter 11 of the novel: "Conditions went from bad to worse. No one could tell when he might be arrested for breaking the curfew. You could not even move across the courtyard at night" (Thiong'o 2012, 93). Evidently, thus, colonial history is embedded in the novel that Ngugi personally witnessed. Simon Gikandi, in his book-length study titled *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*, discusses the authenticity of Ngugi's portrayal of time in *Weep Not, Child*, which represents the collective ordeal of the colonized. He writes:

> Families were displaced from their ancestral lands and forced to live in massive villages, complete with garrisons, under a state of curfew and strict control of movements from one area to another. Thousands of men and women were also arrested without trial and sent to detention camps in remote parts of Kenya. These detainees would return toward the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s to find that their families had been broken up, their children expelled from colonial schools, and their land confiscated. (Gikandi 2000, 26)

The above discussion echoes Njoroge, his family, and his fellow villagers' reality, reinforcing the fact that Njoroge's tale of despair and suffering is an allegory of the plight of the colonized subjects. Even if it runs the risk of essentialization, it cannot be denied that what happened to him happened to thousands of others across Kenya, even across Africa.

However, *Weep Not, Child* deliberately tells the tragic tale of Njoroge. If it was solely Ngotho's story, his traumatic journey could have been as soulfully depicted as Njoroge's. The colonial exploitation robbed him of his land, job, manhood, identity, and finally his life. Losing one son to the First World War, bearing harsh denunciation from another son because of his cowardness, and witnessing his other two sons being taken away to prison, Ngotho becomes more of a tragic figure than Njoroge. If he were alive, would he ever be able to forget the horrifying darkness that swallowed him in the detention camp, the place of his castration, where "time was a succession of nothingness," and where he had to sleep on his sides as "only his buttocks were safe" (Thiong'o 2012, 130)? Or could *Weep Not, Child* have been a story of Njeri or Nyokabi who experiences her husband's death, loses one son to the World War, and other three to the prison, and witnesses the youngest son losing himself. Or it could have been a story of one of those men who are now "beyond the call of the land, the sun, and the moon – Nganga, the barber, Kiarie, and many others …" (Thiong'o 2012, 145). Thus, Njoroge's story is the microcosmic representation of the collective story of colonized Kenya. Similarly, Njoroge's trauma is reminiscent of the collective trauma of thousands of unnamed casualties.

Referring to the distinction between structural trauma and historical trauma, Dominick LaCapra asserts that historical trauma is "specific" (2009, 78), and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject position as-

sociated with it. On the other hand, everyone is subject to structural trauma. He argues that, in structural trauma, "'Victim' is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category" (LaCapra 2014, 79). In this sense, structural trauma can appear in different ways in all societies and can be evoked or addressed in various manners. However, in my opinion, in a colonial context, especially in a country like Kenya or Nigeria, where colonial subjugation was at its extreme, the fine line between historical trauma and structural trauma collapses as they mutually feed on each other. Therefore, I prefer to call (which I maintain throughout my paper) this shared harrowing experience of the colonized as "collective trauma," that is simultaneously both historical and structural, in an attempt to understand the unique condition of the trauma of the colonial casualties.

Kai Erikson explicates the positive significance of collective trauma primarily referring to Buffalo Creek survivors in his book *Everything in Its Path*. He defines collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'" (Erikson 1976, 154). Arguing that trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, he explains how it makes one withdraw from the col-

lective group space while at the same time drawing one back. Therefore, according to him, communal trauma can take two forms: "damage to the tissues that hold human groups intact, and the creation of social climates, communal moods, that come to dominate a group's spirit" (Erikson 1995, 190). The most significant point he makes is that trauma is usually misunderstood as a somewhat private and secluded experience because the person who experiences it often drifts away from the everyday customs and practices of life. But, paradoxically, the drifting away is accompanied, as he asserts, "by revised views of the world that, in their turn, become the basis for communality" (Erikson 1995, 198). Therefore, trauma has the potential of making a community. Already, in a colonial setting, the individual trauma is intricately connected to historical trauma. On top of it, if communal trauma, in general, can make a community, then individual/collective trauma can work as a powerful communal force given a colonial/postcolonial society.

Ngugi in his powerful book *Something Torn and New: Towards an African Renaissance* discusses the desperate need for the act of remembering to deal with the dismembered past. Neither he uses the concept of trauma nor does he speak of collective trauma as a communal force. Yet, the whole book carries the images and traces of collective trauma. He dramatically begins the book with the narrative of the brutal killing of two important historical figures Waiyaki Wa Hinga and King Hintsa of the

Xhosa—the first buried alive and the latter decapitated and displayed at the British Museum—at the hands of the British colonial agents. Thus, he, brilliantly, portrays the colonial dismembering practices which were used "to instill fear and compliant docility" (Thiong'o 2009, 4). Particularly, the first chapter titled "Dismembering Practices: Planting European Memory in Africa," manifests how a colonial regime is both a practice of power and a performance of power whose sole purpose is "to pacify a populace" and "to produce docile minds" (Thiong'o 2009, 4). Since Ngugi's primary focus in this book is African Renaissance, he does not make the psychosomatic impacts of the colonial violence central to his argument. To find this connection robustly, one can turn to Frantz Fanon's discussion on the mental disorders brought about by the colonial atrocities.

Presenting the case studies from Algerian liberation movement against French colonial rule, Fanon discusses how the number of psychiatric patients has increased since 1954 as a direct consequence of colonization. He argues: "When colonization remains unchallenged by armed resistance, when the sum of harmful stimulants exceeds a certain threshold, the colonized's defenses collapse, and many of them end up in psychiatric institutions" (Fanon 2004, 182). It is true that not every casualty of colonial violence, both literal and symbolic, will end up being in a mental hospital. Some victims might end up running away from the traumatic memory

rather than facing it or might keep nurturing it inside not knowing what to do with it. Yet, the symptoms of psychosomatic disorders that he discusses in detail in the chapter titled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" are closely associated with the symptoms of traumatic disorders. Commenting on the brutal colonial war, Fanon, without delineating the notion of trauma, kindles the ordeal of collective trauma: "And for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonial onslaught" (Fanon 2004, 181). Unfortunately, as Craps points out, despite Fanon's valuable insights, his work is altogether absent from most histories of the concept of trauma that "reflects the traditional neglect of race in trauma research" (2013, 132). Critic Rebecca Saunders rightly discusses the crucial need to study Fanon's works with a lens of trauma studies to expand both the fields of postcolonialism and trauma studies. She asserts: "Though rarely read as a trauma theorist, Frantz Fanon draws attention to crucial, yet often overlooked, episodes in the history of trauma: to the specific forms of trauma produced by colonial wars, by colonization itself, and, more diffusely, by racism" (Saunders 2007, 13). Overall, Fanon helps us understand the damage of the colonized's psycho-affective equilibrium due to the colonial onslaught. The backdrop of *Something Torn and New* is replete with the same sense of trauma, fear, loss, and amnesia that is in sync with Fanon's argument.

One of the key purposes of my paper is to find a nexus between Ngugi's concept of re-membering/mourning and Erikson's concept of collective trauma as a communal force. Though Ngugi explicitly does not propose the idea of collective re-membering, I believe that, in spirit, what he proposes is a collective re-membering/mourning in an attempt to search for the wholeness of the African subject that has been "fragmented" (Thiong'o 2009, 29) during the colonial chaos. Since memory is the crucial link between the past and the present, between space and time, he argues that "without a reconnection with African memory, there is no wholeness" (Thiong'o 2009, 39). However, in a postcolonial context, re-membering/mourning is not a simple act of revisiting the past or events. Here, colonial memory is loaded with fear, scar, terror, pain, self-doubt, and self-loathing. Moreover, in a postcolonial context, this practice is disrupted by the presence of a powerful petty middle class who have "an almost incurable desire for the permanent identification with its Western elders" (Thiong'o 2009, 56). To them, collective re-membering is a force that contradicts with their interests, and must be suppressed to consolidate their power.

Therefore, re-membering, as Ngugi argues, is a political act. However, having said that, there is no alternative to come to terms with the traumatic, dismembered past of the history other than confronting it consciously. In a similar manner, trauma studies also suggests the im-

portance of returning to the memories in order to free oneself from the shackle of trauma despite its resistance to be shared and represented. Erikson beautifully argues how the traumatized view of the world can convey a wisdom that requires being heard in its own terms to be deciphered. He asserts: "Traumatic memories are the un-assimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that, in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it" (Erikson 1995, 176). Caruth, on a similar note, emphasizes the centrality of gaining access to a traumatic history either individually or through a community going beyond the pathology of individual suffering. Arguing the necessity of connecting to traumatic history, she discusses how, through its own suffering, it can be both the site of disruption and, agreeing with Kai Erikson, the locus of a "wisdom all its own" (Caruth 1995, 156). In this regard, Ngugi's act of re-membering can be read as coming to terms with collective trauma, which can potentially create a positive communal force, producing, as suggested by Erikson, "wisdom."

The reason I have associated Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* and *Something Torn and New* is that, in my opinion, there is a thematic connection between the two works. Something Torn and New—beginning with a dismembered past and ending with a promise of collective awakening—

starts where the novel—replete with the narrative of fear, terror, chaos, and despair—ends. Though the novel ends with a vague consolation offered to its protagonist, suggested by the paradoxical title, Ngugi leaves traces of hope in the open-ended conclusion of the story. A close look reveals that Njoroge could not go through the suicide because of his sense of responsibility to his community, and to his family, especially to his two mothers. He is pulled back by the call of his mother, Nyokabi, who still believes in him, the same mother who sent him to school to be educated at the beginning of the story to bring honor to the family and order to the community. When he saw his mother holding "a glowing piece of wood that she carried to light the way" (Thiong'o 2012, 147), he had to confront the reality. The glowing piece of wood can be interpreted in many ways: on the one hand, as the collective rage, anger, torment, and trauma, on the other hand, as a desire of freedom, as a glowing hope, as a fiery resistance. Critic Gikandi, thus, sensibly argues that Ngugi's "Mau Mau" novels, most notably *Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*, are "attempts to come to terms with a traumatic past, sort out its conflicting meanings and emotions, and give voice to a hitherto repressed discourse" (2000, 26). Published in 2009, *Something Torn and New* is evidently able to address the trauma, in Ngugi's words "the dismemberment", in a settled and constructive manner. Thus, the trauma inflicted on people like Njoroge and his fellow villagers evolves, in *Something Torn and New*, as a form of postcolonial resistance.

The evolution of trauma studies as a distinct field has unfolded its promise to humanity, advocating the need for a recognition of human suffering and, thereby, elevating the human spirit. Eaglestone sensibly utters the expectations from the evolving trauma theory which are "to continue to reflect on and to attempt to understand the damages that we do to each other, in so doing draw our attention to both our terrible strength and our utter weakness" (2014, 20). At this point, one can, once again, return to Craps, who, implying the decolonization of trauma as a way to more decolonization, suggests that "a decolonized trauma theory can act as a catalyst for meaningful change" (2013, 8). He argues that rethinking trauma studies from a postcolonial perspective and allowing ourselves to encounter nuanced readings of a wide array of narratives of trauma, which do not follow a Eurocentric anti-narrative model, from around the world can help us understand the "shared precariousness" (Craps 2013, 127). Critiquing the spectacularization and sentimentalization of suffering, he speaks in favor of the positive and political value of loss, trauma, and mourning. With a similar spirit, Ngugi transforms the restraining energy of suffering into a promising dynamism in *Something Torn and New.* Therefore, Ngugi's call for decolonizing the mind and Craps's appeal to decolonizing the trauma are connected in a single thread— freeing both actions and thoughts of the humans from the fetters of the colonial/postcolonial entanglement.

Reading *Weep Not, Child*, using the lens of trauma studies, is certainly rewarding as it reinforces the markers of a postcolonial reading of the novel. Inviting postcolonial subjects to be more historically aware, a reading such as this helps to find the traces that the colonial past has left behind for them to assimilate. The tale of Njoroge and his family's trauma is a reminder to the postcolonial subjects of their required action. As suggested by Ngugi in *Something Torn and New,* the ordeal of the dismembered past must be worked through re-membering/mourning it deliberately, both individually and collectively. If the future of trauma studies lies in understanding human suffering and torment across the globe more sensibly and impartially, then the future of the Global South, in a neo-colonial world order, lies in understanding the mechanism and agency used to inflict that suffering and torment. Hence, postcolonial-trauma studies, in reading both colonial and postcolonial literature and history, is as pertinent as neo-liberalism is pressing. As Craps argues, finally, in an attempt to untangle the trauma of colonial/postcolonial entanglement on an optimistic note: "an inclusive and culturally sensitive trauma theory can assist in raising awareness of injustice both past and present and opening up the possibility of a more just global future—and, in so doing, remain faithful to the ethical foundations of the field" (2013, 127).

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Resisting the Apocalypse: Representing the Anthropocene in Indian English Literature

Sagnik Yadaw & Rupsa Roy Chowdhury

Since its emergence in the last half of the twentieth century, environmental discourse in connection with the anthropogenic Climate change has always betrayed a steady adherence to the rhetoric of the apocalypse, a rhetoric that has always been decidedly western, despite its global reach. While the apocalyptic representation of Climate crisis in western Climate fictions has interested literary critics, there hasn't been, to our knowledge, any exploration of its alternative in other literary traditions. With that in mind, this paper will look at Indian English literature where encounters with the Anthropocene are

meagre yet to have a decided shape. We have tried to investigate the presence of apocalypse as a trope in the plot itself or as part of the rhetoric and aesthetic of the text in Indian English literature, asking the extent of western Climate fiction's influence on our tradition and the possibility of Indian English literature becoming an alternative in terms of representation.

The question of representation has generated a fair amount of debate and contesting opinions surrounding the Anthropocene, most controversial of which comes from the Climate change deniers who view these representations in arts and the media as propaganda of environmentalist activists, "pathological crisis-mongers, chicken littles...joyless, puritanical doomsters" (Buell 2003, 30). Though this stance is generally credited to be political, stemming from its own conservative economic policies, corporate lobbying, and industrial interests, the present approach and the predominant tone of the environmentalist discourse often seems more than eager to embrace the binary and add fuel to the fire. For the western culture and its colonised global reality, representing Climate change after all demands, above all else, a careful invoking of spectacular disasters – either imminent, underway or situated in the near past amidst a bleak dystopian world. "Apocalypse", as Lawrence Buell notes, is "the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal"(1995, 285).

In environmental studies, this trope arguably found its most potent shape in 1962 with Rachel Carson's highly influential *Silent Spring* that begins with imagining a nameless American town, a scene of pastoral bliss, coming under a "strange blight" – an "evil spell" that brings with it the "shadow of death" unto the land (2002, 1-3) and that is revealed to be the pervasive poisoning of the environment with synthetic chemical pesticides. A similar example from around the same time is Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*. Published in 1968, it is one of the most popular environmental books till date where the human species itself becomes the impending threat to civilisation. Greg Garrard describes the book as a Neo-Malthusian classic that relies on horrifying apocalyptic projections for its persuasive force (2004, 96) where the author goes as far as describing the present world to be under attack by "three of the four apocalyptic horsemen – war, pestilence, and famine" (Ehrlich 1988, 45). Yet Ehrlich is still compelled to interrupt his catastrophic musings with caveats that emphasise his scenarios to be only possibilities, not predictions (1988, 49) and epilogues that use Pascal's wager to justify the validity of assumptions (1988, 179); the author of fiction, on the other hand, is free from such responsibilities and can provide the reader with a more sensationalist, more adventurous narrative of disaster than any scientific discourse can risk offering. In fact, Climate fiction, since it's origin in the sixties as a subgenre of science fiction, has held on to an established position in the western lit-

erary market. Building upon the post-apocalyptic dystopian works of J. G. Ballard, it continues the Thoreauvian contemplation of Nature from the subjective response of an eremitic figure (Irr 2017) who stands as a witness to the encircling spectacle – the product of an uncritical obsessive gaze that remain present even with politically conscious works like Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* or Margaret Atwood's *The Maddaddam Trilogy*. It is in Hollywood, however, that the tyranny of this gaze is allowed to reduce Climate change to just another disaster where environmental crises stand alongside Nuclear Wars, Alien Invasions, and Zombie outbreaks as modern inflections of the apocalyptic narrative.

Apocalypse then is not merely a trope that permeates the discourse around Climate change but a genre that according to Garrard predates it by at least three thousand years. Garrard locates its origin in the thought of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra who bequeathed to Jewish, Christian and later secular models of history a sense of urgency about the demise of the world (2004, 85). With the *Book of Revelation* of the *New Testament*, the apocalypse – literally "unveiling" from the Greek *Apokalupsis* – found its traditional form while developing all the eschatological connotations that we associate with it today. It is notable however that this genre was as much an end as it was a new beginning. John of Patmos, the putative author of the book, was likely a Jewish war refugee who was prophesying in a highly symbolic language

the downfall of the Roman Empire that will give way to the inheritance of New Jerusalem and a thousand-year-long reign of Christ on Earth (Morrell 2012, 35). Yet the apocalyptic narrative of Climate fiction is generally devoid of any such sense of hope. In her work *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination*, Elizabeth Rosen dubs the contemporary apocalyptic narratives as neo-apocalyptic precisely because they break away from the anticipatory positive elements: "(t)he traditional optimistic conclusion and intent to inspire faith disappear in neo-apocalyptic literature, replaced by imaginative but definitive End scenarios" (Rosen 2008, xv). Looking at environmental discourse, Fredrick Buell finds the "culture of hyperexuberance" (2003, 194) to be the source of this apparent pessimistic proclivity in climate fiction where "(d)epictions of future societies in the midst of perpetual environmental meltdown multiplied as sexy backgrounds for new kinds of excitement and environmental crisis in full bloom was recruited as an only nominally dystopian background against which thrilling high-tech adventures might unfold" (2003, 197).

The relation between apocalypse and Anthropocene thus stands calcified in western culture for all to see, yet the ever-growing anthropogenic impact on our ecology is not exclusive to western reality. Compared to the dystopian impulse prevalent in Western literature of the last fifty odd years that has attracted apocalyptic rhetoric if not at times the narrative of the apocalypse, the paral-

lel brief history of Indian English literature presents a preoccupation with identity above anything where the sense of loss does not extend to the world but remains attached to the self. Furthermore, the socio-political experience of India from the second half of the twentieth century is that of a decolonised developing country and hence, a sense of impending doom hardly comfortably sits with its literary sensibility. Thus, Indian English literature's meagre response to the Anthropocene is always marked with an uneasy influence of western Climate fiction – an influence nonetheless that demands urgent critical attention for the cultivation of a politically conscious approach towards representing the Anthropocene. With that aim, our paper will look at four texts –Arun Joshi's final work *The City & the River* published in 1990, Amitav Ghosh's 2004 novel about the Sundarbans *The Hungry Tide*, Indra Sinha's 2007 published novel about the Bhopal Gas tragedy *Animal's People*, and Sarnath Banerjee's graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* published in 2015 as different examples of how Indian English fiction interacts with the apocalypse motif of Climate fiction.

The only novel of Arun Joshi in the Post-Rushdie period, *The City & the River* breaks away from the realist approach of his earlier fiction for formal experimentation akin to a modern parable. Primarily seen as a political allegory of the Emergency period, this work of an epic tone does also lend itself to interpretations that redirect the all-pervading dichotomy of Joshi's vision (Piciucco 2004,

175) through an ecocritical lens. Recounted through the narration of the Great Yogeshwara to his disciple the Nameless One, the novel tells the tale of an unnamed city ruled by the Grandmaster whose arrogant vision of greatness and development for the city is resisted by the boatmen who are not ready to shift their allegiance to him from the river whose children they consider themselves. In his rise to power and ultimate political control over the city, the Grandmaster continues to ignore the plight of the mud-people, the lower class of the city, erasing them by declaring his time as ''The Era of Ultimate Greatness'' while taking more and more oppressive measures against the boatmen. This depiction of State oppression against characters directly connected to Nature through their names or actions extends the symbolic dimension of the narrative. In fact, while noting the allegorical characterization of Joshi, Nirmala Menon argues in her postcolonial reading of the novel how the two rival camps are represented as belonging to the same time but different historical trajectories with characters such as the Headman,Dharma, Bhumiputra, the Hermit, Grandfather, and so on who bear resemblance to rather primitive, rural or even tribal traditions and cultures and characters such as the Commissioner, the Captain, the AdvisoryCouncil, the Grand Trader and the Minister of Trade whose names suggest a thoroughly modern system of bureaucratic functionaries – a division that elaborates the binary difference between city versus river (2014, 68) . Thus, going beyond direct parallels with

particular referents in Indian politics, the events and the characters of the novel become part of a critique of the discourse of development, of modernity itself. As Pier Paolo Piciucco analyses the symbolic code of the novel: "the city, in particular, is surrounded by the Seven Hills, as Rome is; is crossed by a sacred river reminding one of the Ganges; has some nearby pyramids like Cairo; finally, it has dungeons in the Gold Mines, possibly evoking South African scenery" (2004,175). This city of everywhere is ultimately destroyed by a flood when the river's embankment is accidentally blown away by the military forces during the bombing of a State-declared terrorist's house. As waters rise for 13 whole pages at the end of the novel, the diluvial vision is almost traditional in its apocalyptic potency:

> The waters now reached the top of the fourth hill on which the offices of the new Grand Master stood. A wave went up encircling the base of the building. The touch of chrome and glass seemed to cause a special reaction in the fuming waters because all of a sudden the river was not a river anymore. Under the all-pervasive glow of the searchlights, it turned into an ancient sea, like the sea that had first condensed on the whirling planet a billion years ago. Waves nearly as high as the building rose in quick succession and threw a lock around the shining structure. The inmates of the palace shuddered in horror as the new Grand Master's building broke in the middle and floor by floor, frame by frame, fell into the sea. One

last wave uprooted the foundations and sent them flying into the sky. The waters swept over the top of the hill and cascaded on to the other side in a loud waterfall. (1994, 257-58)

In fact, from the looming presence of an enigmatic prophesy to a mythicised river with its own agency, the narrative of Joshi is almost an inflection of the ecological crisis on an apocalyptic narrative and not the other way around. Even before the cataclysmic end, the authorial voice is unquestionably marked with an apocalyptic tone that finds its eschatological validation in the carefully threaded atmosphere of Hindu religious antiquity so that it is never the apocalypse but the novel itself that does not sit well with other works of Indian English literature.

If the apocalyptic predilection of Joshi's allegorical vision may somehow be traced back to the marginal position of ecological consciousness in his political critique, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* presents us with a more careful, central and invested approach. Compared to Joshi's mythification of ecological crisis and recourse to a symbolic violation of Nature, Ghosh's novel politicises climatological concerns and is decidedly rooted in specificity. His preoccupation with the Sundarbans archipelago, already addressed in one short essay in the public domain "Folly in the Sundarbans", finds further expression in this novel through a constant movement

from the present to both the mythic past and the historic past – a conscious counterapproach against western Climate fiction's staple direction to the future away from the present. Through the experiences of Kanai Dutt, a translator in sudden possession of his uncle's journal about the Marichjhapi massacre, and Piyali Roy, an American cetologist in search of the nearly extinct Gangetic river dolphins, the novel addresses the crises that threat the Sundarbans ecosystem while also forming a critique of the State-sanctioned environmentalism that forces Nature and human in a conflicting binary.

The representation of the prevailing ecological crises in *The Hungry Tide* is negotiated through a careful balancing of the voices of History, Science and Poetry that has earned Ghosh praises from various critics who have attempted to interpret his ecological approach through different radical frameworks (see Giles and Richa for example). Critics have also taken note of the authorial focus on representational politics and the privileging of the subaltern narrative in looking back at history. Such political clarity, however, seems at odds with the end of the novel where Ghosh provides a spectacular depiction of a storm with gradual rising tension and a catastrophic end that destroys lives and habitats as well as the novel's carefully cultivated engagement with nature in a moment's abandon. If as Jana Maria Giles writes, the aim of Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* has been the developing of a postcolonial sublime that does not distance the subject

or reify the object but "enables discovery of our interpenetrations with the natural world, spurring us to witnessing and activism" (2014, 223) then such witnessing is reduced at the end to the spectator's gaze. The motif of the apocalypse resides here again in the diluvial vision, in the foreknowledge of the characters as they anticipate the disaster and in the repeated prophecy of the rising river itself. Thus despite the successful rejection of many generic conventions, it must be asked whether it is western readership or the burden of tradition that ensures that the apocalypse does overtake Ghosh at the end in his only foray into Climate fiction.

Animal's People, Indra Sinha's postcolonial novel of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy marks a shift from the approaches of the two earlier texts which exemplify, at least in part, the hegemonic presence of western Climate fiction in literary representations of the Anthropocene. In writing about the most important environmental disaster of the post-independent India that has become a symbol in the political discourse of the continued violence on the decolonised East by the neo-imperialist West, Sinha consistently calls into question the western literary tropes that pervade the accompanying representations of such violence. The novel tells, in the first person, the story of Animal, a young victim of the gas attack, whose bent spine forces him to walk on all fours. Through Animal's account of Khaufpur, the fictionalised Bhopal, Sinha represents the squalid living

conditions of the victims of the underclass Bhopal as they wait for justice that is perpetually deferred. Apocalypse, in Sinha's novel, is an overt authorial concern with recurring presence as the "Apokalis" – a translation of the idea in Animal's hybrid language that foreshadows the agency the narrative voice will have over the trope. Rather than its inflection into the realist disaster narrative, a good example of which may be found in Amulya Malladi's representation of the event in *A Breath of Fresh Air* (See Malladi 2002, 1-7), apocalypse is brought in Sinha's work with all its eschatological authority as the senile imaginings of Ma Franci, an old French nun who believes the gas attack to be the beginning of the apocalypse. As Animal records,

> Once Ma's eyes were bright blue, now they're milky with coming cataracts, but when she speaks of Sanjo [St. John] such a look comes into them, you'd expect their milky clouds to part and light come streaming through. Ma brings out a small black book, its the one written by Sanjo that tells about the end of the world, she holds it up close to her nose (Sinha 2007, 63)

But the blind prophet is left unheard in Khaufpur for her exposure to the toxic gas has taken away her understanding of the language of the Other that now she can only understand as gibberish. Such symbolic separation doubles in the narrative as the distance between the Christian imagery of the apocalypse (as related by

Ma Franci) and Animal's depiction of Khaufpur to the audience (whom he calls "Eyes") brilliantly problematises disaster representations and forces the scopic drive of Climate fiction into an act of engaged witnessing all the while questioning the presence of voyeuristic pleasure. The brilliance of Sinha's work lies in the unspoken sardonic question that whether in their apocalyptic obsession, western culture and its conditioned global gaze have missed the Second Coming. Rather than locating it in distant global future, *Animal's People* marks the apocalypse as the third world present, thus politicising and contextualising it in an act of subversion, reminding us that "(a)ll things pass, but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us"(Sinha 2007, 366).

The people of the apocalypse are also the concern of Sarnath Banerjee's fourth graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*. Set in a post-apocalyptic Delhi torn by the crisis of water, the narrative moves in a distracted manner among a series of characters across the class division to form a critique of the nexus between capitalism and Anthropocene in a bafflingly new and disarming approach. At the decentred centre of the novel stands Girish, the psychic Plumber from Banerjee's work *The Harappa Files*, who displaced from his hometown of Tambapur, Orissa, as a result of the rising privatisation of Indian Public Sectors, finds himself in Delhi as a migrant labourer, working under the villain Rastogi

who is on a quest to find the mythical underwater river Saraswati. Working through his fundamentalist followers, suggestively named the Saraswati Sena, Rastogi succeeds in exacerbating the paranoia of a struggling community into a violent war on water for profits in real estate while Girish digs deeper and deeper into the Earth for a water-source, discovering instead more and more people wilfully exiled, in hiding, or imprisoned all of whose lives have been somehow connected with water. As Aakriti Mandhwani notes in her review of the book, Banerjee's strength lies in the wry humour and the deadpan ironies that qualifies the entire narrative (2016, 127), the prime example being the titular allusion to the First World War itself. The persistent mocking tone and the general comic approach in engaging with environmental issues mark a welcome change and are effective in jolting the readers, desensitised to traditional apocalyptic rhetoric. The "sparse, simple and not very skillful sketches" (Mandhwani 2016, 126) of Banerjee have a similar role in resisting the elaborately detailed and grand depiction of disaster. In fact, the post-apocalyptic imaginary of Banerjee is quite radical in its playful treatment of the trope. Thus the water crisis of Delhi, itself a serious issue, is made ridiculous by imagining the city as a bleak landscape of staple post-apocalyptic fictions where the narratives of individual and communal survival are reduced to stories like that of the self-exiled Colonel Gambhir whose dark past is revealed to be drinking water from his neighbour's tank (2015, 28-29)

or the people of Panchsheel Enclave, an upper class colony in Delhi, who erect an uranium enrichment plant to defend their water sources (2015, 111). It is notable that here again the post-apocalyptic world is located not in the future but the present. Rather than depending on a changing alien world to suit the post-apocalyptic aesthetic, Banerjee displaces our present and at times mundane reality to a post-apocalyptic scenario so that the ensuing comic spectacle achieves to undermine the trope. Nowhere is this perhaps more apparent than in the representation of the water war itself where Banerjee does away with the narrative completely to opt for a string of cringe-worthy captioned images, a series of single panel spectacles that serves as a parody of the action trope in western representations of environmental crisis. The single panel images are also important in understanding how the privileging of the visual over verbal in multimodal representations opens new, perhaps more effective ways of summoning the apocalypse and consequently of commenting on that action. Pramod K Nayar points out at the conclusion of his book *The Indian Graphic Novel* how the mediated nature of storytelling in graphic novels destabilises the traditional verbal narration to bring to our attention the problematic domains of representation (2016, 193). While Anthropocene in graphic narrative may be expressed by a simple hyper-visibilisation of the issue such as Orijit Sen's *The River of Stories*, to provide an Indian example, Sarnath Banerjee's work is the only Indian English example we could find

where such hypervisibilisation is also politicised through layers of irony and satiric humour in a way that written fiction can never hope to achieve.

Hence the four texts reveal a range of approaches of engaging with the Anthropocene in relation to the motif of the apocalypse. Although the discussion of the texts has been chronological, we must warn against any presumption of progress at such close quarters. Neither do the works exhaust the possibilities of interacting with the apocalypse, though most of the Indian English fictions of the Anthropocene that we have encountered definitely fall in this spectrum. We are also limited in our choice of texts that do not include non-fictional works where, as our opening discussion attest, the apocalypse has its own pervasive tradition. Finally, in recognition of the liminal position of the author of Indian writing in English, we want to move away from the western influence of the apocalypse to remember not only Indian Bhasa literatures' long tradition of ecological works but its recent literary efforts to capture the Anthropocene as well. Among recent works in Bengali literature that critique the anthropogenic impact on our ecosystems, Manindra Gupta's *Nuri Bandar* published in 2016 and Parimal Bhattachrya's *Satyi Rupkatha* published in 2011 may very well be mentioned. The first is a fictional experiment in imagining the non-human through fantasy and philosophy while the second is a development in the genre of travelogue that tells the story of an Odisha

tribe's struggle for survival against the developing India. Both represent the era of the Anthropocene, generate discourses regarding its anthropogenic root, and help initiate reflection in the reader in confronting such reality – all without invoking the end of the world.

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Review of India After Modi: Populism and the Right *by Ajay Gudavarthy. New Delhi: Bloomsbury India, 2019. ISBN: 9789388038812. 266 pages. Rs. 599.*

Dr Saswat Samai Das & Deepak Mathew

"One who cannot take care of home, can't manage country": Nitin Gadkari (The Indian Express, Friday, March 29, 2019)

Ajay Gudavarthy's *India after Modi: Populism and the Right* stands as an emblem of double articulation: the cartographical zeal with which the author 'traces' the current topology of ruling right wing politics in India, sketching its very performativity as a schematic teleological exer-

cise in "authoritarian populism", need not be viewed solely in immanent terms. Rather it discloses an immanent exterior. The author may be seen as delineating a pocketable 'roadmap' for resuscitating the left politics in India in particular and renewing the struggle for securing the very *plasticity* of democracy in general. However, it is not only the uncanny potential of authoritarian populist right wing politics for performance, creation of excesses and experimentation that we encounter here. We also get to encounter the traditional left wing's reluctance to admit, and its denial of, this concealed potential. The critique of right wing populism that Gudavarthy attempts seems more determined to mark it as an expansive open ended dialectical undermining of left wing's archetypical urgency to call it altogether fascist and totalitarian.

Gudavarthy divides his book into four parts, with a brilliant introduction which is the crux of every argument he makes. Indeed, the introduction itself may be seen as a summary of the whole book, but more importantly, it offers certain political concepts which Gudavarthy finds unique to populism, and which he further elucidates in four parts. These concepts may be seen as conceptual maps that one needs to follow carefully to navigate the extravagance of details and political observations Gudavarthy offers throughout the chapters, the anchor which grounds each chapter to the central theoretical theme of how left-liberals can address the new symbolism orchestrated by right-wing populism.

Gudavarthy represents a 'unique historical moment' of 'irreducibility of multiplicities' where the vast expanse of multiple lines of flight immanently converging to subvert the current political system is elided by an embattled zone, replete with recalcitrant inner antagonisms of divides and stratifications, with elite and the subaltern, the rich and poor, the upper castes and *Dalits*, pitted against each other, precipitating sensations of arborescence and antagonizing dualisms. The kind of performative dialectics that the far right invents to articulate its schizophrenias, its condition of 'feeling like a subaltern but thinking like an elite', is put by it to an instrumental use. This dialectics sharply divides the multiplicities at the level of their micro-identities only to consolidate them into aggressive majoritarian formations such as Hindus and Indians. The right mobilizes that 'hurt pride' which elites feel for being left behind by progressing subalterns and creates in the process an 'imaginary community' Gudavarthy calls 'mezzanine elites', upper castes yet economically and socially weak, like the 'precariats' of the current 'neoliberal times'.

However, Gudavarthy in his book dwells on the far right's partisan mobilization of hurt pride only to situate it as the breeding ground for the production of what stands as its dialectical counterpoint, the new cultural subalterns. Dispersed throughout the spectrum, from elite universities to pre-modern communities, and standing as an anti-thesis of the mezzanine elites, are the *Dal-*

it-Bahujan subalterns left behind by neoliberalism and modernity. In fact, it is this strategy of the right that Ajay encapsulates when he says in the Introduction, 'the right appropriates without investing and subverts without challenging'. The right empowers corporate neoliberalism which leads to the production of new class and caste based antagonisms and then appropriates these antagonisms by couching them in intractable symbolic narratives like 'hurt pride', which can only be resolved by resolving the deadlock of neoliberalism. More than the pragmatic and explicit realpolitik analyzed in all chapters it is these concepts of right-wing populism that the left needs to encounter, confront, and deftly re-appropriate. Part I and II are critical examinations of the organizational structure and function of BJP-RSS in India. Gudavarthy argues that a return to Nehruvian centrism wedded to constitutional secularism is no longer possible, let alone desirable, after the rise of Modi, a rise woven into the post-truth fabric of neoliberal times where culture and truth is no longer understood in terms of 'what is', but stands as a figment of our private world of affects and desires, our imagination of 'what should have been'. It is indeed this private world of emotions and desires that Modi's populism strategically exploits and integrates with the public space of constitutional politics. This even becomes the basis for violence and lynching unleashed by fringe groups within the hydra-headed RSS whereby blame can never be put on the mother organization. Public perceptions, including its endorsement

and vehement opposition of the impulsive acts, from *gau-raksha* (cattle protection) to left-liberal protests, are also guided by this private world of affects and desires.

Gudavarthy locates the strongman phenomenon of populism and the Indian perception of a masculine ascetic leader within the dialectical interplay of the public and the private. The shift from Modi to Yogi (Adityanaath), from the one who cleanses the system with demonetization to the one who purifies the system as a '*sannyasi*,' also uses the operativity of this private world in the public sphere. Together they not only give the sense of return to a Hindu way of life but also become the fraternal authority injecting an oedipal sense of fear, anger and paranoia into the public discourse of politics. It is because the right governs like a proto-ascetic, masculine and strong father figure would manage his family affairs that it can have an absolute or totalitarian agenda of Hindutva and divide the communities on the lines of caste and class and reunite them as Hindus and Indians. Governance in the hands of the right becomes tantamount to running a family. So much so that it wouldn't be outlandish to analyze their policies in relation with government institutions and particularly universities like JNU, in this light. JNU for the right stands as an extended 'family' that must be disciplined, contained and controlled — hence the systematic attack on JNU, terming it anti-national, reinstating compulsory attendance and silencing deviant voices. The bio-politics of ruling right in

this sense is aimed at reducing the diverse "potential" of multiple vocalities arising out of the centers of knowledge to the level of banal familial domestic singularity.

Gudavarthy argues that it was electoral success that was central to the rise of ruling right and Hindutva brigade, and examines how BJP fared in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, and how their propaganda and tactics differed in each case. BJP's Caste based propaganda turned out to be ineffective in Bihar because it stood as a 'forced imitation' of Nitish Kumar's caste based propaganda. Voters turned to Nitish Kumar instead of BJP because they felt that the former was a seasoned player, as far as caste propaganda was concerned, and elections in Bihar were always caste centric. In contrast BJP fared well in UP because the opposition carried out an exercise in replicating the patterns of BJP's Hindutva narrative and voters felt BJP stood as an epitome of that while the former had just begun to learn the rules of the game. Intervention of the left-liberals in elections derives a new meaning at this juncture, and Part III and IV offers some ideas in this respect. The reason for which the left has till now gloriously failed in addressing the issues concerning the Kashmiri pundits and *Dalit-Bahujan* is because it tends to view these issues as marginal or almost inconsequential in relation to its world view based on traditional majoritarian divides or Gramscian historical blocs instead of deftly reconstructing the right's performative dialectics. The way forward for left-liberals is

to first become rhizomatic, reaching out to the new caste based minor identities and addressing their concerns and then become broadly and effectively dialectical, uniting the precariats, new cultural subalterns and Dalit-Bahujans into a renewed space of resistance.

Ambedkar had made it clear that the annihilation of caste was contingent upon the acquisition of power by lower castes, and the subtlest means for this in democracy was the electoral victory. The electoral victory of Mayavathi Bahujan politics, and multiple Dalit political organizations which have come up because of the failure of the former, and activists like Kancha Iliah stand as praxial equivalent of Ambedkar's logic in this sense. However, according to Gudavarthy, the only way the left could meet the situation in Kashmir, mirroring the discontent of Muslim youth towards Indian government and the polarization between the former and Kashmiri pundits, was by inventing its own brand of populism with dirigist, secular-centrist revolutionary transformation of communities.

A transformation of the present economic system, from neoliberalism to welfare state, is a necessary condition for any cultural revolution in the Gramscian sense, but paradoxically such a transformation of economy is only possible by uniting a divided society as a field of struggle. Ambedkar's idea of fraternity, which Nehruvian centrism could not accommodate, is indispensable

for cultural transformation. Though Gudavarthy argues for a leftist populist intervention here by addressing the anger, fears and desires of the precariats, one could disagree and look for older yet still effective leftist interventions as manifested in the programmes of Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbin which are lot less populists but advocate revolutionary class struggle and hopes for working towards a *kairos* moment. This is because the future of democracy in general hinges upon sustaining the idea of struggle and revolution. The politicization of love that Gudavarthy suggests in his book as a cure to misogyny and sexism may sound radical and rebellious at the same time, but in dialectical terms it could be the only solution for the alleviation of injustice towards women. The same holds true for *India After Modi* as a whole, which stands as a revolutionary work. For the left parties it will stand as an exercise in double articulation. It not only delivers a shot in the arm for the entropic left but holds a road map as well for the resuscitation of left politics in India.

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