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Contents

9 Notes on Contributors

228

EDITORS' NOTE

As I start writing this introduction to the latest issue of our journal, once again I am confronted with the bitter reality of India's fragile and fractured nationhood because of a video that has gone viral which shows two tribal women being paraded naked and assaulted by a mob of men as part of the protracted ethnic violence which has engulfed the North-Eastern state of Manipur for the last two months. However, it is only now, after the circulation of this horrific, nauseating video that the Indian Prime Minister has found some words with which to publicly address a crisis ravaging a state in which his party is running a government. Unfortunately, this incident is ironically similar to the kind of harrowing experiences of violence which lacerated the state of Gujarat, some twenty years ago when the current Prime Minister was the Chief Minister of that state. What ties the events of Manipur with some of the most horrific events of Gujarat is the foregrounding of that toxic masculinity which identittarian populism regularly mobilises to rouse and perpetuate hatred as part of the larger narrative of masculinist nationalism where male machismo remains at the heart of otherising violence whose victims are often women. It is remarkable how across the length and breadth of this country we have

fostered such schizoid hordes of murderous men whose existential hatred of women, perhaps born out of their mismanaged relationships with their mothers, inculcates in them the capacity to indisciminately ravage women who are made to embody the hated 'other', either on account of caste or creed or ethnicity — a tradition that has been traumatising the subcontinent at least since the time of the Partition. How does one heal a nation that is so fundamentally flawed and yet capable flaunting its supposedly enlightened and pioneering role at a global level?

One of the common methods which the Indian state has become adept at using is that of curbing the flow of information, especially across social media, so that whatever outrage is there, can be managed without much effect and eventually subjected to oblivion. So whether it is the BBC Documentary of the Prime Minister or the horrific video from Manipur that had started circulating across social media - the state's immediate response is to delete all social media posts related to the events and eliminating the links from the digital space through constant reporting by the endless recruits of the insidious IT cell that generally equates dissent with treason, secularism with sedition and rationality with anti-national interests. What these cyber storm-troopers essentially manufacture is an epistemic violence of the nationalist kind which seeks to erase all that is harmonious and free and joyous among us with garish brushstrokes of

rigidity, division and belligerence. No wonder then that whether in UP or Manipur or Maharashtra - sectarian violence is on the rise. And such is the pervasiveness of this machinery of violence that at times even the mere suspicion of one's involvement in some alleged crime can lead to the arrival of bulldozers which will raze one's legally owned property. Obviously the rule of law is a chimera that only torments pulverised psyches of disillusioned idealists. In most cases might remains right, rights remain paper-thin and hopes of some fruitful dawn are devoured by night.

And yet the struggle goes on! However miniscule the extent of resistance might be, despite all odds, even at the cost of life or limbs, people keep fighting against injustice and tyranny and propaganda for a future which they might not behold. And we the beleaguered academics, in sundry colleges and universities, often buffetted by administrators who are short-sighted, pompous and sadistic, despite all the useless paperwork, despite the paucity of resources, despite the drudgeries of the exhausting daily commute - we keep on trying to preserve that precious idea of what literature should always be - the triumph of the beautiful against all that is ugly, degrading and dehumanising. Through all the novels and plays and poems and stories we keep on trying to sensitise young souls about bridging the gap between self and other so that they learn to embrace and expand the essence of love instead of being bogged down by the barbarians at the gates who are always ready to pounce.

This idealistic belief is at times all that keeps one going despite all the "heaps of broken images" that line our paths as we keep moving round the prickly pear, prickly pear, prickly pear while cities crack in the violet air. This invocation of Eliot and *The Waste Land* is hardly surprising to those who know me and my tendency of teaching Eliot by proxy. *The Waste Land* reached the centenary of its publication in 2022 and this year marks the hundredth year of its first publication as a book in the United Kingdom. Despite all my anathema about Eliot's anti-semitism, elitism and imperial-evangelical fantasies, as a student of English literature I keep returning to the seminal text of *The Waste Land* which continues to offer us metaphors for our contemporary world which may seem maddening and disintegrating at the same time. But like Eliot's narrator we too must try to shore the fragments against our own ruin by attempting to sustain our individual commitment to redeem time on a personal level, even as pillars and columns collapse around us.
I see this journal and the work of all the contributors, reviewers and proofreaders and readers who help to sustain it as part of this solemn project. Is this vanity or vainglory? Could be. Time will tell. For now we keep typing, keep articulating, keep voicing all that the powers that be wish to silence and repress. Speak with us. Write with us. Read with us.

Criminalisation and Colonial Violence: Thuggees in the Accounts of William Henry Sleeman

Kumaraditya Sarkar

Of the myriad ways violence has helped propagated colonialism, criminalisation has always been a quintessential one. It facilitated the justification of the 'debasement' of the indigenous people, and the ensuing violence that would be unleashed on them. I employ the term 'debasement' here in accordance to David Spurr; in his pathbreaking work *The Rhetoric of Empire*, Spurr formulated twelve rhetorical modes through which the coloniser perceived the colonised. They "constitute a kind of repertoire for colonial discourse, a range of tropes, conceptual categories, and logical operations available for purposes of representation" (Spurr 1993, 3). His theorisation of the rhetoric of 'debasement' formulates

from the act of this representational classification, and is perched deep into the notions of abjection. According to him, this rhetoric works on certain parallelisms:

> [T]he qualities assigned to the individual savage – dishonesty, suspicion, superstition, lack of self-discipline – are reflected more generally in societies characterized by corruption, xenophobia, tribalism, and the inability to govern themselves. In the same way, social problems in health and sanitation, unemployment, or population growth come to be associated with individual filth, indolence, and sexual promiscuity . . . Here synecdoche and metaphor combine, marking the individual as both cause and emblem of a more general degradation. (Spurr 1993, 76)

Debasement thus functions as a prohibition preserving the Self – or protecting the boundaries of colonial cultural values and practices – against the Other. It is then followed by the rhetoric of 'negation', operating as a "provincial erasure, clearing a space for the expansion for the colonial imagination and for the pursuit of desire" (Spurr 1993, 92-93). Most often, the indigenous colonised would be overrepresented in crime, followed by the process of victimisation that would justify the unleashing of colonial violence upon them in the name of justice. In fact, the very legitimacy of the colonial justice is subject to problematization by the postcolonial critic or historiographer.

Although colonial practices are almost as old as the human civilisation, and critics like Asselin Charles have cited the Mesopotamian victory-stele of Naram-Sin of Akkad or the ancient Egyptian Narmar Pallette as examples of colonialism in the antiquity, the present study shall limit the use of the term to Western Europe's colonisation of nearly half the globe in the last few centuries (Charles 1995, 135-136). Furthermore, although that phenomenon has arguably come to an end (apart from a few 'overseas' territories) several decades ago, and attempts at ameliorating the conditions of the indigenous populace have been severally made, studies show the prevalence of colonial criminalisation in the modern world as well. Chris Cunneen, for example, has discussed in detail "the high rates of criminalization and victimization of indigenous people in North America, Australia, and New Zealand", as well as the "role of colonization in defining crime" (Cunneen 2013, 387). Thus, critical discussions of the colonial models of criminalisation and violence are still quite pertinent.

In theory, 'criminality' is always a colonial discourse, for laws are made by and for those in power. According to criminologist Colin Sumner, historical studies on criminal justice "must inevitably turn us towards colonialism . . . crime is not behaviour universally given in human nature and history, but a moral-political concept with culturally and historically varying form and content" (Sumner 1982, 10). Cunneen also opines that the crimi-

nal laws are historically rooted in colonialism, but traditional criminology "has had a problem with understanding the importance of colonialism in structuring ideas about crime and punishment" (Cunneen 2013, 390). "Can criminology have a role unless it develops a theory of colonialism and its effects?", he asks. "The dominant intellectual frameworks of criminology were established in the west with a view of understanding and explaining the phenomena of crime and crime control within specific western contexts" (Cunneen 2017, 251).

Several scholars, chiefly postcolonial, have attempted to analyse the role of law and criminality in the colonial process, along with their continued relevance in the present day with exploitative consequences. Biko Agozino, for example, have explored how colonisers have utilised the judiciary system to subjugate the colonised, and how the criminologists indirectly facilitated this process by virtue of their silence. He resorts to African literary works like *Devil on the Cross* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and *Oga Na Tief Man* by Tunde Fatunde to illustrate the potential for the decolonisation of criminology (Agozino 2003, 140-156). Harry Blagg, on the other hand, has focused on the colonial residues in the modern-day governance of Aboriginal people in an Australian context, attributing much of the violence as "less the product of Aboriginal culture…but rather a manifestation of the damage caused to the fabric of Aboriginal law and society by the intrusion of some of the most negative and destructive

aspects of non-Aboriginal culture" (Blagg 2007, 178). All of them more or less agreed with Cunneen that postcolonial perspectives on crime should adjudge it through the context of "the material practices and ideologies of the colonial states and by the resistances of colonized people" (Cunneen 2017, 250).

This, however, is not an advocacy in favour of the absence of crime altogether in a colonised state; nevertheless, crimes committed by the indigenous peoples, and the marginalised of them in particular, were exaggerated manifold and moulded to fit the colonial propaganda of criminalising the victims. Such criminalisation not only facilitated the justification of colonial violence; it also helped the attestation and codification of individual occurrences of violence by the imperialist state. The present study aims at demonstrating this through the discourse of *thuggee* in the works of William Henry Sleeman, an early nineteenth-century English administrator in India, juxtaposing his works with his contemporaries like Fanny Parkes.

Of all the orientalist myths and lore, few could capture the English imagination as fascinatingly as that of thuggee, the crime committed by a thug. For the uninitiated, "the thugs were a fraternity of ritual stranglers who preyed on travellers along the highways of nineteenth century India. Their unsuspecting victims were first deceived into joining the thugs and later at some secluded spot strangled, plundered and buried" (Wagner 2007, 1).

They also supposedly sacrificed their victim to the goddess Kali, practised several occult rituals, fervently followed omens, and communicated in secret codes – all of these contributing to heighten the exoticism associated with the early nineteenth-century thugs.

Indeed, highway crimes in India preceded the advent of the East India Company: there are "various accounts of highway robbery predating the official discovery of thuggee by the British in the early 1800s" (Wagner 2007, 25). Kim A. Wagner (*Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India,* 2007) has written extensively on the thuggees in pre-colonial India. Nitin Sinha in his article "Mobility, control and criminality in early colonial India, 1760s-1850s" (2008) and Sagnik Bhattacharya's "Monsters in the Dark: The Discovery of Thuggee and Demographic Knowledge in Colonial India" (2020) also offer useful insights. Incidents of crime, however, began to reduce with several administrative measures being adopted by the East India Company in the 1830s; although the thuggees secured safer places in contemporary fictions, travelogues, and popular imaginations – beginning with Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* (1839). Without ever realising, Taylor founded an orientalist discourse that has "not only outlived the empire that tried to eradicate its very existence, but has also made its way into the 1984 Hollywood film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and several other 'orientalist' portrayals of India" (Bhattacharya 2020, 2).

An army officer in his earlier career, Sleeman was selected for civil employ in 1820, and in 1829, assumed the charge of the Deputy Commissioner of Sagar in present-day Madhya Pradesh. The Company's version of the subsequent history is somewhat this:

> In 1829, the leader of one of the gangs gave himself up to Major Sleeman, then Deputy Commissioner of Sagaur, as he sat at the door of his tent. This man had a strange and terrible tale to unfold – that beneath the very tent pitched, his informant told him to his great discomfort and surprise, the bodies of travellers murdered by the Thugs were concealed. The tale was true and the remains were found. A searching investigation followed and the entire iniquitous organisation was brought to light. A special department for the complete suppression of Thuggee was created and placed under the charge of F.C. Smith, Agent to the Governor General for Central India and Maj. William Sleeman. Within six years nearly four thousand thugs were brought to light, out of which two thousand thugs were convicted and the rest were sentenced to death or transported for life. Thuggee became extinct. (Shah 1993, 52)

According to Sleeman, the thugs were members of a countrywide organisation, who communicated in a secret language called Ramasee. He even compiled a mammoth dictionary of Ramasee terms called *Ramaseeana: Or a Vocabulary of the Peculiar Language Used by the Thugs* (1836).

According to Bhattacharya, the sheer scale of efforts, budgetary allocations, and the granting of unchecked power to the Thuggee and Dacoity Department transformed the discourse of thuggee "into a 'metaphor' and a personification of the fear of the 'other' and the unknown" (Bhattacharya 2020, 2). Sleeman's identification of thugs as members of a vicious pan-Indian Kali-worshipping cult renders them as unusual criminals, calling for unusually prompt administrative interventions, as opposed to petty criminals of regular sort. The belief that vicious cults of such sort actually existed was so deeply ingrained in the English psyche, and later instilled to Indians, that Amrish Puri defended his enactment of Mola Ram in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* – the leader of the thugs who tears off the heart of a man and burns him alive in a flaming pit of lava.

Nitin Sinha thinks that the exaggeration of thuggee as an enigmatic monstrosity "provided a powerful optic through which to classify criminality" (Sinha 2008, 5). However, he noted that bringing mobile communities such as the Gosains and Banjaras under the aegis of the umbrella term thuggee may be justified by the fact that vagrancy in seventeenth-century England was considered a crime as well. Secondly, there is not enough scholastic evidence regarding how these mobile groups were treated by pre-colonial administrators, such as the Mughals (Sinha 2008, 5-6). Nevertheless, there is no denying of the fact that the exaggerated criminalisation of thug-

gee propagated colonial motifs. Alexander Leon Macfie opined that the thuggee archive almost singlehandedly created by Sleeman was very much an orientalist construction, "the product of a deep-seated European inclination to make an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Occident (Europe, the West) and the Orient (the East)" (Macfie 2008, 384). Robert Grant Williams also believed that Taylor's motif behind writing *The Confessions of a Thug* was to justify colonial expansion by the evangelical earnestness of redeeming the criminality of Indians (Macfie 2008, 385). Although critics like Mary Poovey suggested that the novel may be read as "not as a justification of British imperialism but as an oblique critique of the East India Company and everything it represented", such claims are difficult to substantiate, despite the facts that Taylor's wife was half Indian, and "he ruled in Shorapur like a nabob, enjoying all the pleasures of a well-stocked harem" (Macfie 2008, 385).

Spurr's aforementioned rhetoric of Debasement is followed by Negation, a strategy by which the self conceives of the other as "absence, emptiness, nothingness, or death" (Spurr 1993, 92). It has twofold benefits for the coloniser. On the one hand, this negation "serves to reject the ambiguous object for which language and experience provide no adequate framework of interpretation" (Spurr 1993, 92). On the other hand, it also "acts as a kind of provincial erasure, clearing a space for

the expansion for the colonial imagination and for the pursuit of desire" (Spurr 1993, 92-93). Spurr cites the works of Darwin, Conrad, and Gide to establish how European narratives of exploration negate the indigenous space, followed by a negation of their histories and languages.

The next rhetoric, which logically follows after that of Negation, is "Affirmation: The White Man's Burden". The colonial discourse time and again returns to "an idealization of the colonialist enterprise against the setting of emptiness and disorder", because it "must always reaffirm its value in the face of an engulfing nothingness" (Spurr 1993, 109). This rhetoric, Spurr observes, is "deployed on behalf of a collective subjectivity which idealizes itself variously in the- name of civilization, humanity, science, progress, etc., so that the repeated affirmation of such values becomes in itself a means of gaining power and mastery" (Spurr 1993, 109). After Debasement and Negation, this is where the colonial rhetoric seems to come a full circle.

How exactly did Sleeman exaggerate the thuggee? And what might have been his motifs in doing so? He tells his English readers in his 1844 book *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*:

> The Thugs went on their adventures in large gangs; and two or more were commonly united in the

> course of an expedition in the perpetration of many murders. Every man shared the booty according to the rank he held in the gang, or the part he took in the murders; and the rank of every man, and the part he took generally, or in any particular murder, were generally well known to all. (Sleeman 1844, 115).

He informs us about a large "gang of two hundred Thugs . . . encamped in the grove at Hindoreea in the cold season of 1814", who robbed and murdered "seven men well-armed with swords and matchlocks . . . bearing treasure from the bank of Motee Kocheea, at Jubbulpore, to their correspondents at Banda, to the value of four thousand five hundred rupees" (Sleeman 1844, 103). Next, he recounted another story about some thugs in Lucknow, attacking a Mogul officer and his men, narrated to Sleeman by a "native commissioned officer of a regiment of native infantry" (Sleeman 1844, 106). "All the parties they [the Mogul officer and his men] met on the road belonged to a gang of Jumaldehee Thugs, of the Kingdom of Oude" (Sleeman 1844, 109).

Thus, Sleeman made a mountain out of a mole; what was in reality isolated and tiny groups of impoverished highwaymen was projected as a monstruous, enigmatic, and nationwide confederacy, no less disciplined and regimented than any guerrilla army. This justified the unleashing of state policing and violence in an unforeseen manner: special courts were set up for the trial of the thugs, courts that had permissions to do without ade-

quate and satisfactory evidences, and often sentenced the victims based on words of mouth (Sleeman 1844, 118-9). Furthermore, if the judiciary was so biased in favour of the colonial raj, it may easily be imagined the violence police must have unleashed on the thugs before transferring them to courts of law. Unfortunately, the records that exist are only diary accounts and papers related to court trials; there is absolutely no statistics of how many people must have been convicted of thuggee by the police – even before moving to the court – and were either killed in encounters or in police custody.

The period of the suppression of the thuggee, spearheaded by W. H. Sleeman, was also the time when Fanny Parkes was wandering about in the hinterlands of India. Like any other white person in India at that time, Parkes could not altogether dismiss the lore of thuggee as fictitious; in fact, she might be said to have been a little intrigued by the idea of the sacred stranglers. Nevertheless, she sounded a note of caution, and lamented the judicial delay in deciding the fate of the convicts. Fanny wrote about an execution of twenty-five thugs on May 9, 1831, that "it cannot but be lamented that the course of justice is so slow; as these men, who were this day executed, have been in prison for more than eight years, for want of sufficient evidence" (Parkes 1850, 201).

> If the thugs were so guilty, how come there was so little evidence? It was certainly an apposite query. In normal circumstances, courts in India did not ac-

> cept the statements of informers who turned 'King's Evidence' on their fellow captives; but in the case of thugs, the colonial laws were altered to allow the conviction of thugs on evidence which would in other circumstances be regarded as wholly suspect and inadequate. The result was that accused thugs hoping for a pardon would produce lengthy and dramatic testimonials, giving evidence against scores of men they alleged to be former colleagues. (Dalrymple 2002, 15).

The question that pertinently follows must be about the justification of such violence, if any. According to Dalrymple, some historians "allege that the British used the suppression of Thuggee as an excuse and a justification for widening their area of rule" (Dalrymple 2002, 15). It was probably no coincidence that the same William Henry Sleeman insistently wrote about the misrule in the state of Oudh or Awadh, although he advocated against direct annexation of the same citing administrative difficulties.

The Kingdom of Oudh, according to Sleeman, was not only the land of the aforementioned "Jumaldehee Thugs", but of utter civil disorder and lack of administration by the crown. He blames the Rajput feudal lords of north and central India for the commotion:

> Thus were founded the Bondelas, Powars, and Chundeles, upon the ruin of the Chundeles in Bundelcund,

> the Boghelas in Boghelcund, or Rewa, the Kuchwahas, the Sukurwars, and others along the Chumbul river, and throughout all parts of India. These classes have never learnt anything, or considered anything worth learning, but the use of the sword; and a Rajpoot chief, next to leading a gang of his own on great enterprises, delights in nothing so much as having a gang or two, under his patron age, for little ones. There is hardly a single chief, of the Hindoo military class, in the Bundelcund, or Gwalior territories, who does not keep a gang of robbers of some kind or other . . . It is much the same in the kingdom of Oude, where the lands are for the most part held by the same Hindoo military classes, who are in a continual state of war with each other, or with the government authorities (Sleeman 1844, 188).

Sleeman observes that "[a] good deal of the lands of the Mahomedan sovereign of Oude are, in the same manner, held by barons of the Rajpoot tribe; and some of them are almost always in the field engaged in the same kind of warfare against their sovereign" (Sleeman 1844, 322). One important reason behind this continuous clash between the government and the landholders is the former's unjust tax demands. Until the season of tillage comes, peace prevails; "but when the crops begin to ripen, the governor begins to rise in his demands for revenue; and the Rajpoot landholders and cultivators to sharpen their swords and burnish their spears" (Sleeman 1844, 324). To an Englishman who studied the unques-

tioned submission of the thanes of yore to their lords in his own country, this is not just unthinkable, but savage.

Sleeman also found Oudh the home to several abominable practices, such as horrific rituals associated with infanticide (Sleeman 1858, 38). The judiciary is also unjust and corruption is at its peak: "those who are sentenced to six years' imprisonment in Oude, are release in six months, and those who are sentenced to six months, are released in six years" (Sleeman 1858, 41). Serious convicts would bribe their way out of the prison, and then revenge themselves on those who had aided the government in their arrest or conviction. Again, if any member of the royalty fell sick, prisoners were released, albeit superstitiously, hoping for their recovery. Sleeman notes that there is no protection for life or property, for there is no effective policing by the state of Oudh: "cases of atrocious murders and robberies which come before me every day, and are acknowledged by the local authorities, and neighbours of the sufferers, to have taken place, are frightful" (Sleeman 1858, 41). There was also agitation regarding the successor to throne, the contestants being Moonna Jan and Naseer-od Dowlah (Sleeman 1858, 175).

The annexation was Oudh, nevertheless, did not happen overnight. By the treaty of 1801, Oudh was divided into two equal shares; one of them was transferred to the British government, while the other was reserved

for the sovereign of the state of Oudh. Thus, when Sleeman was pursuing the eradication of thuggee in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the East India Company had already had a formidable political presence in Oudh. On the 20th of January, 1831, Lord William Bentinck the Governor-General held a conference with Oudh's sovereign in presence of the entire ministry, where it was observed that "maladministration in all departments were such as to warrant and require the authoritative interference of the British Government for their correction" (Sleeman 1858, 194). Also, as Sleeman has observed:

> [T]he Governor-General intended to make a strong representation to the authorities in England on the state of misrule prevailing, and to solicit their sanction to the adoption of specific measures, even to the length of assuming the direct administration of the country, if the evils were not corrected in the interim. (Sleeman 1858, 195)

On the 24th day of December, 1847, the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie further cautioned the King of Oudh, having learnt from the Resident about the ongoing misrule. In 1848, Sleeman was sent to Lucknow as a Resident, and the next year, he was asked to tour across Oudh and prepare a report on the administrative condition of the state. Sleeman recorded that experience in his 1858 book, *A Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849-1850,* that "two years have elapsed since the cau-

tion was given, and the King has done nothing to improve his administration, abstained from no personal indulgence, given no attention whatever to public affairs" (Sleeman 1858, 41). Although Sleeman did not suggest a direct annexation of the Kingdom of Oudh under the Doctrine of Lapse, he nevertheless opined that as the King failed to rule his people, the only viable "alternative left appears to be for the paramount power [East India Company] to take upon itself the administration", doling out pensions to the sovereign and the stipendiary dependents of the aristocracy. He was nevertheless replaced as the English Resident in Oudh by Outram in 1854, who also reported utter misrule and massacre in the state.

Neither Sleeman nor Dalhousie had recommended a forcible abduction of the king and the annexation of his land; however, that was only for safeguarding the political image of the Company in the eyes of Indians. The Company executives in London were divided in this matter, and in January 1856, Dalhousie was advised to propose to the king a titular, Vatican sovereignty. As the king Wajid Ali Shah refused to accept the same, he was forcibly dethroned and transported to Calcutta, where he would die next year. It was also perhaps more than a coincidence that Sleeman breathed his last on February 10, 1856; and the following day was Wajid Ali Shah's last as the sovereign ruler of the Kingdom of Oudh.
In retrospect, thus, all of it seems to be part of a larger schema: beginning with the complains and the subse-

quent suppression of thuggee by unleashing unforeseen foundational violence, and then going on to incessantly grudge about the severity of misrule in the Kingdom of Oudh, William Henry Sleeman probably served as an agent of the East India Company – just what David Spurr would later theorise in his rhetoric of Debasement, Negation, and Affirmation.

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Nation-State Violence and the Practice of Freedom in Naguib Mahfouz's *Karnak Café*

De Noumedem Peter Caleb & Kelvin Ngong Toh

Introduction

The nation is a construct that operates, from its inception, with violence. This violence is implied in the nation's efforts to unite, synthesize and subsume experiences under its governing ideology on the basis of historical and sociocultural affinities. Consequently, those who are perceived as not belonging are differentiated and excluded. However, violence, in its crude form, erupts when the nation is associated with the state – the state being a coercive centralised authority imposed, in the case of African countries, over fragile national entities to consolidate

them. Anthony Bogues in *Empire of Liberty* asserts that "the defining feature of colonial sovereignty was 'might is right', the right of the sword" and was accompanied by "fundamental attempts to shape the consciousness of the so-called native" (Bogues 2010, 20). Perverted by colonisation, African nation-states are distorted replicas of their Western model as they have adopted the logic of sovereign colonial power. Hence, the nation-state in Africa perpetuates violence on the native, in the native and around the native.

Violence has been one of the most recurrent, yet most condemned, phenomenon in human societies. Its perpetuation even in so-called civilised and modern nations poses the ontological problem of the imperative of freedom for mankind's futures. If the urgency of freedom is felt in Western colonial societies, it is felt more so in the non-Western lands where peoples, cultures, psychologies and state institutions have been sullied by diverse forms of colonial brutality. Therefore, it is not surprising to read Achille Mbembe's submission, in "Fragile Freedom", that postcolonial theory has "devoted a great deal of energy to unmasking the languages and practices of freedom" (Mbembe 2011, 14). This concern with the unveiling of possible freedom strategies is a key hallmark of postcolonial literatures that target the dismantlement of tyrannical modes of power. With an imaginative power fuelled by the desire to indict and transform regimes of violence, postcolonial writers have depicted

colonially-informed violence in their works (Boehmer 2005, 221).

From a postcolonial perspective, violence inheres in the nation-state. As E. San Juan submits in "Postcolonialism and the Question of Nation-State Violence", postcolonial theory views the nation-state as arbitrary and artificial, as an illegitimate construction imposed by the Western colonial order and as an apparatus that takes recourse to violence and brutal discipline to rule its citizens (Juan 2001, 887-8). As Fanon indicates in "The Wretched of the Earth", the leaders of newly independent nations fall prey to a daft mimicry of the Western national model: instead of imitating the "dynamic, pioneer aspect" of the Western national bourgeoisie, these leaders rather follow "the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention" (Fanon 1963, 153). Therefore, the nation-states which these post-independence leaders inherit and whose destinies they preside become hubs of decadent, violent and de-humanising experiences. We use this postcolonial lens in this article to demonstrate that Mahfouz's *Karnak Café* represents nation-state violence and allegorically enacts freedom strategies. These freedom strategies are not only circumscribed to the Egyptian experience; they also speak to oppressed people suffering under the yoke of tyrannical regimes worldwide. As such, Mahfouz's novel addresses the operation of violence in a nation-state setting with the aim of proposing a solution.

Karnak Café is set in 1967, fifteen years after Egyptian independence. The historical context of the novel is the famous June war waged by Egypt against Israeli forces. Nonetheless, the violence depicted in the narrative is not the violence at the war fronts. What Mahfouz exposes is the despotic exercise of power by the Nasserite regime on powerless citizens whose ideas oppose the nationalist narrative imposed and misguided by the former. It is against this violence that freedom is performed in the novel. Mbembe in "Fragile Freedom" argues that "freedom is first and foremost a relational and contextual practice, that is, a practice that always take shape in opposition to whatever is locally conceived as un-freedom" (Mbembe 2011, 29). In Egypt represented in *Karnak Café*, the imperative of freedom is related with and opposed to the sadistic perpetration of violence in the minds, on the bodies and in the already-marginal environment occupied by citizens. Violence and the practice of freedom in the novel are mirrored by allegorical elements employed by the novelist. These elements are the opposite worlds, the liberation of speech and the cathartic encounter. The opposite worlds refer to the representation of settings that clearly create a divide between the leaders and the common people. The liberation of speech alludes to the narrative devices employed by the novelist to bring to the limelight the brutality of the ruling establishment and criticise it. The cathartic encounter relates to the meeting (the joint efforts) of both the oppressor and the oppressed to stop violence, dialogue and enact freedom avenues.

The Violent Construction of Polarities

Mahfouz's *Karnak Café* depicts two different spaces: a space occupied by the oppressed and another handled by the post-independence oppressor. The first world is the world of the café itself which is inhabited by the oppressed. As the narrator visits Al-Mahdi street, he stumbles across the café, which he describes as "small and off the main street" (Mahfouz 2008, 7). This description already indicates the secluded and marginal experience of those who visit attend the café. These people are outside the main national discourse; hence they find solace in the communal grace offered by the café. Talking about this café, the narrator adds that "the place was so small that they all seemed like a single family" (8). The simile comparing café attendants to a single family is pertinent in that it indicates a shared experience and a common vision. This unity is maintained in spite of the different age groups that mingle are found in the café. The old, the middle-aged and the young ones commune together. We are even told that the past, the present and eventually, the future, are in a warm embrace in the café ((Mahfouz 2008, 9). 9). It is in this familial atmosphere that the narrator penetrates and progressively connects with each of the café's customers.

This café is also distinguished by its authenticity and chasteness. The café is described as clean, the coffee it

serves is excellent (undiluted) and its water is pure (Mahfouz 2008, 9). What is more, the manageress of the café, Qurunfula, possesses an "enigmatic kind of beauty" and gives the assurance of "a carefully controlled inner strength" (Mahfouz 2008, 8). These are confirmed by an interesting detail provided by the narrator: Qurunfula is a former belly-dancer who has never yielded to the temptation of prostitution (Mahfouz 2008, 10). Thus, she has always preserved her dignity and the café she owns is the symbol of the values she advocates. In all, beauty, unity, dignity and relative peace characterise the café and give it the allures of a garden that ought to be extended to all parts of Egypt.

Nevertheless, one question needs to be asked: why does Mahfouz represent the café from the outset with attributes of a marginalised authenticity? The answer to this question is found in the perception that postcolonial writers have of the oppressed. Although the oppressed in postcolonial criticism is not ascribed pristine and flawless identities, he/she is recognised a humane and civilised character prior to Western violent incursion (Loomba 2005, 21). It is in this regard that Mahfouz's depiction of the café matches with the postcolonial vision of the oppressed.

The second world represented in *Karnak Café* is the underground prison cell that belongs to the oppressor. Not much information is given about this space in the novel.

However, the few hints that are given denote the psychological torture and physical violence inflicted by the post-independence oppressor on the citizens. Ismail al-Shaykh, a young university graduate and a regular visitor of the café, gives his impressions when he is kidnapped and thrown into the oppressor's world. In the novel, Ismail describes this space thus:

> The floor felt cold to my bare feet. The only thing I came into contact with was the walls; there was absolutely nothing in the room, no chairs, no rug, nothing standing at all. Darkness, emptiness, despair, terror, that was it. In a dark and silent environment like that, time stops altogether; … I had no idea when the darkness was supposed to disappear or when some form of life would emerge from this all-embracing corpse of a place. (Mahfouz 2008, 46)

The recurrent image of darkness and isolation pervading this space contrasts with the lively atmosphere of the Café. The absence of any form of life reveals the Machiavellian intention of the oppressor, notably; to let the oppressed understand that what awaits them is an anonymous death. The message is that as long as these oppressed ones criticise Nasser's regimes and policies, the disciplinary apparatus of the nation-state will crush them. The prison itself is configured to suffuse the minds of citizens with the imminence of death. By so doingdoing so, the oppressor's space diffuses fear.

Fear is a fundamental element in the economy of tyranny. The despotic establishment uses fear to induce submission in the minds of the governed. In *Karnak Café*, the sudden disappearance of the young folk from the café creates a general sense of fear. The use of fear by the repressive machinery is all the more efficient because the population of the café and its premises lives in apprehension of the unknown. There is no explanation, no information, and no spectacular action. Only rumours, a dreadful silence and the reality of the disappearances (Mahfouz 2008, 20). This spread of violence contributes to what Louis Althusser calls interpellation. In "Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts", we read that interpellation is a concept that describes "how the 'subject' is located and constructed by specific ideological and discursive operations" (Ashcroft et al. 2013, 249). These ideological operations are enforced and perpetuated by state apparatuses like the one represented in *Karnak Café*. When this apparatus uses fear, it actually constructs in individuals subjectivities and consciousnesses that will either resign desperately to tyranny or adopt the ideology of the apparatus. In both cases, the tyrant's power is maintained.

Evidence of this interpellation is found in the narrator's soliloquy. After the disappearances, the narrator tries to understand what is happening and he nearly falls in the trap of the apparatus. It is worth noting that for the Nasserite regime, the policy of Arab socialism and Egypt's

current war against Israel are indications that the nation is strong. Nasser's leadership is said to carry the promise of an authentic nationalist revival in a context of poverty and unemployment. The narrator, already falling in the trap of interpellation, starts reflecting: "should we [Egyptians] not be willing to endure a bit of pain and inconvenience in the process of turning our state, the most powerful in the Middle East, into a model of a scientific, socialist, and industrial nation?" (Mahfouz 2008, 20). With this kind of reasoning, the narrator imbibes the logic of the state apparatus to minimise, or worst, legitimise the atrocities committed by the regime.

Fortunately for the narrator, he realises the perfidy of his reasoning and tells admits to himself: "by applying such logic, I could even manage to convince myself that death itself had its own particular requirements and benefits" (Mahfouz 2008, 20). Thus, the narrator succeeds to resist interpellation but one cannot assert that the café visitors have donedo the same. In fact, Qurunfula, the manageress is paralysed by fear and falls into depression (Mahfouz 2008, 18). The violence of fear takes a heavy toll on her and spoils the serene atmosphere that had reigned in the café. The narrator reveals that "a new atmosphere of caution pervaded the place, rather like a peculiar smell whose source you cannot trace… in every innocent glance there was also a feeling of apprehension" (Mahfouz 2008, 21). Through fear, the space of the oppressor impinges on the elementary liberties

enjoyed by the oppressed. Consequently, a new order is imposed indirectly on the café.

In the novel, the second disappearance of the young café visitors creates total panic. Paralysed by fear, all those who attend the café unanimously agree "to steer clear of politics as far as possible" so that no one would accuse them (Mahfouz 2008, 29). Even in their facial expressions, one can read a suppressed anger caused by their interpellation (Mahfouz 2008, 30). Indeed, by avoiding political issues, the café visitors allow their consciousnesses to be directed by the tyrannical establishment. They progressively alienate themselves from society, hoping to preserve at least their lives. However, the reality of oppression is ever-present in their minds as they compare Egypt's apparent pan-Arabic strength with the crushing of personal rights and freedoms within the country.

The pertinent problem that Qurunfula and other characters pose here is one of the uses of power: is power measured by its ability to advocate ideals and oppress those who think differently or is it measured by its ability to secure difference and protect the downtrodden? (Mahfouz 2008, 26). Frantz Fanon in "The Wretched of the Earth" asserts that in post-independence Africa, the establishment "does not create a state that reassures the ordinary citizen, but rather one that arouses his anxiety" by displaying its strength, by bullying, by jostling and by

"intimating to the citizen that he is in continual danger" (Fanon 1963, 165).

The third disappearance of young café visitors is the signal of the regime's determination to discipline and punish its contradictors. This third disappearance is special because upon returning to the café, the young café visitors bring the news of the assassination of one of them: Hilmi Hamada. The news of this death intensifies fear and silence. Anthony Bogues in "Empire of Liberty" explains the link between violence, fear and ordering when he posits that "as a practice violence is about spectacle. To be effective as order, it must first awe and then create fear. Even though violence kills or maims, sometimes its logic is not about death per se but about its deployment in the production of order" (Bogues 2010, 90). Hilmi's death is used to impose silence as the new order of the café. In a bid to consolidate its vertical power, the nation-state employs violence (sometimes reaching the point of death) to instil fear in the minds of all those who have divergent views. For instance, when the news of Hilmi's murder is spread, the concern of café visitors is to protect themselves from unseen, potential terrors and keep quiet amidst the "generally oppressive social atmosphere" (Mahfouz 2008, 36). Therefore, those who attend the café are oppressed subjects whose consciousnesses are silenced by fear. Mahfouz's allegorical representation of two opposite settings (that of the oppressed and the oppressor) highlights the role of fear at the same

time as it exposes the fragmentation of individual and collective consciousnesses.

Witnessing against the Secrets of Violence

The second allegorical element used in Mahfouz's novel is the liberation of speech. *Karnak Café* is narrated by a persona who plays the role of an investigator. To understand what he is investigating, we need to go back to what pushes him to visit the café. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator enters Al-Mahdi Street to get his watch repaired and, while waiting for the technician to repair, he visits neighbouring stores, and comes across the Karnak café (Mahfouz 2008, 7). The fact that the narrator gives his watch for repair symbolises the decay of the present state of affairs in Egypt. Like the watch that has a problem and must be repaired, Egypt has a pending problem that needs to be addressed. The narrator does not like idleness; hence he keeps himself busy with an inspection or an investigation of his environment/society and stumbles across the main problem destroying the country. He finds this problem in the café. He notices that despite the café's relative peace, unity and beauty, there is a generalised sentiment of marginalisation and silencing pervading its visitors. Describing one of the secrets of the café, the narrator says: "it was – and still is – a gathering-place for people with extremely interesting and provocative viewpoints; whether they yell or speak softly, they are expressing the realities of living

history" (Mahfouz 2008, 13). Thus, the main activity in the café is speaking: indictments and non-conformist views are exposed daily in this café by Egyptians of all generations who re-write the national history. We learn that they sometimes discuss politics from leftist and Islamist perspectives, pointing at the loopholes of Nasser's regime (Mahfouz 2008, 13). The problem, therefore, is that these Egyptians feel oppressed and voice it in a context where state power is dictating everyone's support to Egyptian military forces. The regime regards this war against Israel as the golden opportunity for a first national victory.

Inversely, the Egyptian people represented by café visitors are suffering in their flesh under a despotic regime that has not been able to provide food, employment or health, but is rather concerned with national glorification through war. Hence, the utility of this war is questioned by the café visitors. The narrator expresses the dismay of oppressed Egyptians during this era when he says: "All the people sitting there inside the café had buried deep inside them some kind of bitter experience, whether humiliation, defeat, or failure" (Mahfouz 2008, 14). These bitter experiences refer to the silencing mechanisms employed by Nasser's regime – mechanisms that have pushed these revolutionary minds to meet only discreetly in a hidden coffee shop.

With thisese information in mind, we can infer that the narrating in *Karnak Café* is aimed at revealing the regime's

despotism and liberating the voices of oppressed Egyptians. Because to speak is to live and to live is to uphold justice, the liberation freedom of speech in this novel is very important. The narrator does that by enabling four main characters to express their opinions and predicaments. We have already discussed Qurunfula's sentiments. We are now considering two other characters: Ismail al-Shaykh and Zaynab Diyab. By interviewing them, the narrator tries to palpate oppression and foregrounds the agency of the oppressed, that is, his/her ability to denounce his/her interpellation by state power.

From his discussion with the narrator, we gather that Ismail originates from a poor family in Dabas Alley. His diploma in law is the fruit of both his hard work and his mother's sweet-selling activity (Mahfouz 2008, 39-40). The only jobs that are well-known and respected in his area are that of the policeman and public prosecutor (Mahfouz 2008, 40). This detail is important because it reveals that Nasser's regime focuses more on the disciplinary apparatus than anything. The neighbourhood has many schools but the level of unemployment is so high that education seems useless. The economy and other social welfare sectors are dysfunctional; only those who work as policemen and prosecutors are well off. From this poor background, Ismail can be said to live in the shadow of independent Egypt. His social marginalisation is deepened by the implications of Egypt's mad rush into war against Israel in June 1967.

In his denunciations, Ismail reveals the portrait of his oppressor, a man called Khalid Safwan. Safwan is described with features that evoke sadistic power. When describing Safwan, Ismail says: "his image is indelibly recorded deep inside me. Of medium height, he had a large, elongated face with bushy eyebrows that pointed upwards. He had big, sunken eyes and a broad, prominent forehead. His jaw was strong, but he managed to keep his expression totally neutral" (Mahfouz 2008, 47). Safwan's eyes give the image of a big, fixed camera that spies on the country; his forehead emphasizes his power and commandment; his strong jaws repress any gleeful emotion; his neutral expression reveals his coldness. The fact that Safwan's image is engraved in Ismail's mind is noteworthy because it shows how the oppressor maintains power: causing the oppressed to carry in his consciousness the omnipresence of terror. These details attest that Safwan is the very symbol of tyranny in the novel.

Ismail, who suffers from Safwan's coercive actions, relates his 'cross-examination' by this state prosecutor in a dark underground cell. What Ismail denounces are the ignominious tactics employed by this state prosecutor against him and his lover, Zaynab. For example, Safwan tells Ismail that if he refuses to confess that he is a communist – an accusation that is false in Ismail's case – he (Safwan) will torture Zaynab (Mahfouz 2008, 51-52). Evidently, Safwan knows that he is torturing innocent

individuals upon whom he has invented piles of lies. So what is the rationale behind this tyranny? In *Karnak Café* the narrator's reflections, which seem to echo the novelist's own voice, provide an interesting answer: "it seems that, whenever darkness envelops us, we are intoxicated by power and tempted to emulate the gods; with that, a savage and barbaric heritage is aroused deep within us and revives the spirit of ages long since past" (Mahfouz 2008, 22-23). Tyranny is irrational: it springs from the darkest emotions of those who, upon realising their privileged position in society, seize the opportunity to behave like gods, dictating lives and shattering futures. It is in this darkness that Safwan resides.

The novel represents what this darkness consists ofin. Following Safwan's directives, one of the guards shows Ismail the suspended corpse of Hilmi Hamada. Ismail sees Hilmi "hanging by his feet, silent and motionless" (Mahfouz 2008, 53). Hilmi has been assassinated for his communist ideas. This spectacle of torture is meant to push Ismail to submit to the dictates of the regime. The use of death by violent regimes is a well-known strategy. Anthony Bogues in "Empire of Liberty" posits that:

> A regime of violence has to enact regular practices of death because its purpose is the absolute negation of the human life-form in its plurality….**When power acts** upon the body, the primary aims of torture are to destroy the 'meaning-making capacity of

> the tortured and…to replace it with the meanings of the torturer'. Thus the body as animated life becomes an object to be seized and mastered. Regimes of extreme violence dominate through a form of power that operates in the flesh. (Bogues 2010, 74, emphasis added)

The despotic exercise of power has for its target the de-humanisation of the oppressed subject. This de-humanisation entails the withdrawal of the agency of the oppressed, the replacement of his subjectivity by the oppressor's own and the manipulation of his life in the oppressor's hands.

Hilmi's torture and assassination serve these purposes. Ismail, who was Hilmi's friend, imagines having the same end as Hilmi and is coerced into compromising with the establishment. Ismail's 'meaning-making' capacity is replaced by Safwan's when he becomes an informer for the regime. As an informer, Ismail has "a fixed salary and a tortured conscience" (Mahfouz 2008, 55). His mind and his flesh have been turned into sites for the operation of power.

Our discussion of state violence in post-independence African nations would be incomplete if we did not mention a contemporary event: the barbaric assassination of Cameroonian journalist, Martinez Zogo. Known as a virulent denouncer of flagrant embezzlements, corruptions and favouritism ongoing within the Camer-

oonian state apparatus, Martinez Zogo is abducted on the evening of 17 January 2023. Like Hilmi in *Karnak Café*, no news of Zogo is gotten till the discovery of his mutilated and sodomised corpse on 22 January 2023. According to a worldwide press-freedom organisation, Reporters Without Borders, Martinez Zogo's murder is "a state crime" involving "more than twenty members of Cameroon's General Directorate for External Investigations (DGRE)" as well as government ministers and a business tycoon (n. p). Like in Himi's case, the use of violence on Zogo is intimately related to the protection of a particular ruling establishment, regardless of the consent or not of the person who embodies that establishment. The reference to the contemporary case of Zogo testifies that the operation of power is obdurately vertical in many African nation-states and that there is an urgent need for horizontalisation of power dynamics.

If the operation of power is allegorised through a transgression of agency and life in the cases of Hilmi and Ismail, this transgression is moral in the case of Zaynab Diyab. As a young beautiful woman, her role in *Karnak Café* spurs the problematic of ethics/morality in the exercise of vertical power. Zaynab originates from a very poor family where her mother is a washerwoman cum broker, her father is an alcoholic and her brother is a plumber (Mahfouz 2008, 61-63). She therefore lives her childhood in sheer economic precariousness, endlessly having to survive daily. Her miseries are intensified by the

fact that she grows into a beautiful woman. The problem of morality and freedom starts posing itself because wealthy men want to transform her into a prostitute. She successfully undermines their manoeuvers. Even as the novel begins, we are told that she has never had sex with Ismail, her boyfriend, because she is attached to her honour. It is worth noting that her attachment to chastity is not prescribed by religion; it is a personal principle on which she builds her identity and self-esteem. One can deduce that as a woman, Zaynab represents the morality and dignity of the downtrodden. It is her long-preserved honour and chasteness that Khalid Safwan violates after imprisoning her (Mahfouz 2008, 67).

Seizing the opportunity offered to her by the narrator, Zaynab speaks. She defies the feeling of shame to tell what she has been subjected to. Firstly, Safwan humiliates Zaynab by obliging her to perform all her bodily functions (eating, sleeping, peeing, drinking, and defecating) in one and the same place (Mahfouz 2008, 67). This disgracing order aims at denying her humanness. Secondly, she explains exactly how Safwan robs her of her cherished chasteness. She explains: "he decided to put on a titillating and exciting spectacle for himself, something utterly beyond the bounds of normalcy and decency… Down to the last detail…right in front of him!" (68). In this excerpt, Zaynab expresses with disgust her rape by Safwan. Although the rape may not have been literal, Safwan's sadomasochist motives make it all the same

de-humanising. Zaynab's body, like Hilmi's, is used for the deployment of the spectacle of power. The fact that she is stripped naked before the naked eyes of the oppressor evokes the image of an all-powerful god before whom everything is unveiled and laid bare. Safwan, representing the god in this image, seems to inform Zaynab that her body has no secret for him and that her dignity belongs to him.

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resenting the god in this image, seems to inform Zaynab that her body has no secret for him and that her dignity belongs to him.

Also, Zaynab's symbolic rape is a means used by Safwan to bruise her ethical sense. This idea is important when discussing the relationship between oppressors and oppressed because the latter's humanness and dignity are enshrined in the values he/she upholds. When a colonial and/or despotic establishment attacks these values, it leaves the oppressed vulnerable and permeable to the oppressor's corrupt norms. It is with this logic that European colonialists perverted the cultural and ethical norms of indigenes round the globe. Caleb Simmons in "Subtle Subversions" submits that one of the major aims of colonising powers was the "reshaping [of] indigenous religious belief and practice while altering the related and intertwining social, political and cosmological structures by which they were upheld" (Simmons 2020, 191). The adulteration of moral and ethical values therefore lie at the core of colonial power. In the post-independence context portrayed in *Karnak Café,* this aspect of colonial power is used by Safwan when he dispossesses Zaynab of her dignity. After her rape, Zaynab feels she is dirty and useless. Consequently, she falls into the oppressor's trap by engaging in an amoral life, choosing to "behave like a dishonourable woman" than being the beautiful virtuous woman she has been (Mahfouz 2008, 70).

Expressing her dismay and resignation, Zaynab tells the narrator: "We seem to have turned into a nation of deviants. All the costs in terms of life – the defeat and anxiety – they have managed to demolish our sense of values" (Mahfouz 2008, 71). Zaynab stops seeing the need to preserve her dignity; she has been made to espouse the immoral values of her torturer. She is even transformed into an accomplice of oppression when she becomes an informer for the state police. Safwan instrumentalizes Zaynab's poverty to make her work for the despotic regime in order to earn her daily bread. We learn that she secretly reports Hilmi to the police, whence his arrest and eventual murder by the apparatus' hangmen (72). As the novel ends, Zaynab is in a complete loss: the regime has inflicted profound wounds in her psyche and moral constitution to the extent that she is no longer sure of who she is, of what she wants, and of which way to go. The narrator, reflecting on her state acknowledges that it will need time for Zaynab and for Egyptians as a whole to bandage these wounds and purify themselves (Mahfouz 2008, 74).

Freedom: A Possible End to Violence?

Mahfouz represents freedom as a practice that entails the participation of both the oppressor and his victims. Freedom is not necessarily an end in itself but a constant performance of what it could mean for individuals and the society. Annalisa Oboe and Shaul Bassi in "Experi-

ences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures" corroborate this view when they assert that:

> ....It is only when freedom is acted out and located, when it comes to circumscribe a set of essentials for the here and now of culture, an individual, a class, a society, that it can somehow 'speak'. What we can hear, then, is how freedom posits itself as an essential constituent of the human experience in its manifold declinations. So we need to confront freedom not so much as a grand scheme of liberation of humanity from falsehood and oppression but as an ensemble of multiple and varied attempts at performing what in fact it might mean, through experiences involving minorities, colonised and neo-colonised people,… but also an above all as an aesthetic commitment to its representation in the arts and, particularly, in writing. (Oboe and Bassi 2011, 6)

Mahfouz's commitment to the notion of freedom is noticeable in the way he allegorises it. He actually performs or practices freedom when he includes in the plot of *Karnak Café* a cathartic encounter between the oppressor and the oppressed. This encounter portrays the mutual freedom that both entities should work for: an inclusive transformation of power dynamics. This even entails reconceptualising power and fixing its new aims, boundaries and future. Through this cathartic encounter, Mahfouz foregrounds the imperative of freedom and proposes a way out.

The cathartic encounter in Mahfouz's novel involves three elements that appear chronologically: the oppressor's penitence, the rejection of rancour/blame theory by the oppressed, and their joint recourse to culture. Let us begin with the first of these elements. In our earlier discussion we discussed the two opposing worlds in the novel: the world of the oppressor (prison) which terrorises the world of the victims (the café). However, at the end of the novel, the oppressor finds himself in the café. Khalid Safwan is brought into the space he used to prey upon. His entrance in the café is signalled by a change, even in his physiognomy. Safwan is sick-looking, pale and feeble in contrast with his previous cold, lackadaisical posture (Mahfouz 2008, 78).

What has changed this representative of tyranny is the fact that he was imprisoned for three years and his goods were sequestered by the same regime that he served. In other words, he has felt in his mind and flesh the ignominies of despotism and has understood the necessity to repent so-to-speak. Even though this repentance is not a religious kind, it involves a complete transformation in the oppressor's mind-set. Such experience of freedom has been allegorised in Bole Butake's Family Saga in which Kamalo, the avid oppressor, is redeemed by the play that is staged by Kamala, the oppressed. Mahfouz makes a similar textualisation of freedom when 1) he makes Safwan experience the same dire conditions he

had inflicted on his compatriots, and 2) he draws Safwan in to the café, putting him in a position to engage an inclusive dialogue with those he had oppressed.

As Safwan encounters those he had oppressed in *Karnak Café,* Safwan emits this wish: "Perhaps the two broken fragments will come together again" (Mahfouz 2008, 79). The two broken fragments he refers to are the two main groups that the operation of power has divided: the oppressor and the oppressed. His wish is that these power-related identities be drowned in the merging of human values. This means letting one's humanity to rise above the Manichean divisions provoked by power abuses. For Safwan who was the oppressor, there is need for him to acknowledge his wrongs. He confesses: "We're all of us both criminals and victims" (Mahfouz 2008, 80). This assertion is not meant to minimise the sufferings he caused as oppressor and criminal; rather, it throws light on the reality that both the oppressor and the oppressed loseosse their humanity when power is mis-handled. Whether one is on the side of the oppressor or on that of the oppressed, his/her dignity and the moral values that accompany it are systematically trampled upon. Thus, Safwan recognises that he was a criminal who tortured other humans to preserve power, but that simultaneously, he was victimising himself in the process of de-humanising others.

Safwan's regret about his past conduct is evident in the poetic verses he recites at the end of his first encounter

with Café visitors. He describes "*A chair radiating limitless power, / A magic eye revealing the truth, / A living member dying, / An unseen microbe pulsating with life*" (Mahfouz 2008, 80, italicised in source). In the first line, Safwan refers to his authoritarian display of power. The second line evokes his malicious habit of spying people secretly in order to construct realities about them and use these fake truths against the people. In line three, Safwan (the persona) describes the use of torture and death to subdue the bodies of young dissenters. Then, in the fourth line, Safwan employs the ironical image of an unseen microbe to evoke the profound malady and the ensuing putrefaction that pervade individual and collective lives in the country. Obviously, Safwan realises that his vertical power has only had obnoxious consequences. He therefore starts freeing himself of his vices when he acknowledges that his display of violence was at best wrong, at worst inhuman.

The second element in the practice of freedom is the rejection of blame game by the oppressed. It is true that in the heat of violence and condemnations, blames are-blaming is inevitable and even normal. Nevertheless, in a configuration where there is a clear sign from the oppressor that he wants to help change the vertical paradigm of power into a horizontal one, sticking to blame theories and antagonisms is fruitless. Ali Oguz Dirioz in "A Word of Caution on Eurocentrism Critiques" states that "there is a trap of simply criticising without effectively providing any viable alternatives with universal

validity and adaptability" (Dirioz 2021, 94). The trap is that the oppressed keeps being reactionary rather than seeking workable solutions to the problem.

In postcolonial discourse, Bill Ashcroft has also warned against the preservation of antagonisms and binaries. In "Post-Colonial Transformation", he argues that essentialisms and distinctions between coloniser/colonised, oppressor/oppressed end up reifying political exploitation (Ashcroft 2001, 21). Hence, those who are or feel dominated ought to seize opportunities to reflect on possible solutions, especially with the (former) oppressor: the practice of freedom is more convincing and fruitful when there is interaction between and mutual liberation of both groups. This implies that while the oppressor takes decisive measures to dialogue inclusively with the oppressed, the latter seizes this opportunity to introduce horizontal/free (or to an extent, democratic) mechanisms in the structure of power. In this way, both oppressor and oppressed mutualise efforts toward practicing freedom.

In *Karnak Café*, the young visitors of the café, including Ismail and Zaynab, progressively loose hold of resentment against Safwan. They focus on his deep political knowledge on Egypt and tap from what he has as intellectual baggage. The narrator tells us that in just three months, people in the café stop avoiding Safwan, but

instead welcome him as everyone else (Mahfouz 2008, 82). He becomes a member of the café family and he regularly initiates conversations with the young ones. It becomes a habit that they discuss the nation's present and future together. At this stage, one can say that the opposing worlds and identities that existed at the beginning of the novel have been brought together to form a melting pot of constructive ideas.

Now that identities have been de-polarised, the people of Karnak café sit together and examine the potential of culture in relation to freedom. This is the third element in the practice of freedom. The recourse to culture has been experienced in other African texts as a pertinent way forward. For example, in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's "Black Caps and Red Feathers", the absolutism of president Ahidjo's regime is decried and the solution proposed by one of the characters (Creature) is a culturally anchored power. In his play, the clan (representing post-independence Cameroon) will be cleansed only when the leader's power "is linked with the umbilical cord of the gods and ancestors of the clan" (Nkengasong 2001, 57). A fluid connection between indigenous value systems and the nation-state establishment is indispensable for freedom to be experienced. Likewise, the reliance on culture is expressed by literary critics in "A Half-Ride toward the Radiant Sun" where they demonstrate that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun" hinges freedom (from the spiral of

civil war) "on the spiritual strength of native culture, on its power to reconcile the fragments of the postcolonial being" (Forbang-Looh and Caleb 2020, 67). Thus, both in postcolonial literature and criticism, the idea of culture as a springboard to freedom is recurrent.

In Mahfouz's *Karnak Café*, Safwan opines that instead of wasting much money for a useless war (that even ended with Egypt's woeful defeat), Egyptians should invest on culture. He says: "We should be spending every single penny we have making ourselves more advanced culturally" (Mahfouz 2008, 83). For him, the solution to autocratic power is that culture takes central stage and ceases to be a mere folkloric phenomenon. For him, when culture is at the core of societal structures, autocracy is disavowed, resorts to violence are rejected and the dignity of human beings is sacralised (Mahfouz 2008, 83). The advancement of culture is perceived by Safwan not to be nativist. Rather, he thinks that protecting the values of native culture does not preclude learning from positive values of Western civilisation. One of these values is "the value of science and the scientific method" (Mahfouz 2008, 83).

Furthermore, when we pay attention to the symbolism of Karnak in ancient Egypt, we understand why its setting is important for our understanding of *Karnak Café*. Actually, Karnak was one of the most sacred sites of ancient Egypt. Many temples were erected there including

that of god Amun, who was believed to interact directly with humans. By choosing Karnak as setting for his narrative, Mahfouz indicates that indigenous culture ought to serve as normative space for the regulation of societal forces in Egypt.

These discussions on culture tie with the postcolonial perspective which advocates hybridity: "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation [or despotic power in general]" (Ashcroft et al. 2013, 135). When the encounter between oppressor and oppressed occurs, the culture of tyranny and the culture of frontal resistance collapse to produce a hybrid culture: the culture of freedom. The culture of freedom is the practice of mutualising efforts, energies and ideas in a bid to horizontalise power and transform it from a chain to a guardrail. This transformation is a process that may not find an absolute end. Thus, freedom is a constant practice in which the future is always envisaged to be brighter than the present because it refines the experiences, struggles and hopes of the present. Discussing the link between freedom and the future, Oboe and Bassi in "Experiences of Freedom" say that "there is of necessity a utopian element in freedom, a moment of deferral in its experience which calls for belief and hope" (Oboe and Bassi 2011, 9). It is this hope that ends the narrating in *Karnak Café* as we observe the young generation preparing to take the lead of a freer tomorrow.

The representation of violence and freedom in Mahfouz's *Karnak Café* ties with David Jefferess's ideas on transformational resistance. According to him, resistance that constructs political freedom "must foreground concerns for social and cultural transformation in the form of social justice, popular political participation and non-antagonistic constructions of identity" (Jefferess 2003, 12). These elements clearly spark from our analysis of Mahfouz's text: social justice is obtained when Safwan serves a prison term and his money is confiscated; popular political participation occurs when both Safwan and the café visitors discuss and exchange political views; and their identities cease to be antagonistic when Safwan abandons tyranny and his victims abandon anger and blame theories. *Karnak Café* can therefore be read as a postcolonial novel that allegorically represents the horizontalisation of vertical power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has analysed the allegory of postcolonial power politics in Mahfouz's *Karnak Café*. Using setting, narrative point of view and plot, this article has examined the manner in which the novel allegorically captures the operation of violence and the practice of freedom. It has been demonstrated that freedom from violence and tyranny is sketched in a cathartic encounter between the oppressor and the oppressed. This encounter de-polarises identities and enables joint efforts to conceptualise new, humanised power dynamics.

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Avisuality of Atomic Violence: A Study of Keiji Nakazawa's *I Saw It* (1972)

Madhurima Nargis

> There were no bones left in my mother's ashes, as there normally are after a cremation. Radioactive cesium from the bomb had eaten away all her bones to the point that they disintegrated. The bomb had deprived me of my mother's bones.
> —Keiji Nakazawa
> The lack of detailed visual evidence of the bomb's effects reinforced this initial positive response. US occupation authorities censored reports from the city and suppressed the more horrifying films and photographs of corpses and maimed survivors. Americans initially saw only images of the awesome mushroom cloud.
> —Paul Boyer
> I'm going to show their faces to the bastards who started the war . . . and the bastards who dropped the bomb . . . I'm going to make this my final masterpiece! Dammit all! Dammit all!
> —Keiji Nakazawa

What does it mean to be human?

The ghastly horrors of the nuclear blasts and their unacceptable effects on human beings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki question the human cost of atomic weapons. Unfortunately, the 1945 massacre of Japanese people remains one of the most brutal scars perpetually etched in human history. It was equally challenging to archive in any medium after most of the living witnesses disintegrated with the dropping of the a-bombs. Peace was restored at the cost of dismantled human bodies. Keiji's Nakazawa's firsthand witness, a 48-page graphic memoir *I Saw It (*1972), responds to the mechanical objectivity of photographs in the twenty-first century. It is also one of the first spectacles of a graphic reaction against the injustice faced by a Japanese artist-writer to speak about the unspeakable through his comic book. This paper intends to discuss the relevance of hand-drawn imprints to represent violence in an era of technologically advanced photographic accuracy. This paper aims to bring forth the politics of hibakusha, silencing the survivors from sharing their side of the story on the cataclysmic event of 1945. The research paper will also discuss the possibilities and scopes of the medium of comics as a counter-discourse resisting the invisible culture of hiding the truth of Japan beneath the infamous mushroom cloud. Finally, the paper also wishes to address the motif behind a defamiliarized representation of the banality

of violence through the beautifully colored panels of the text.

Violence Etched on the Human Body

The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a sudden action taken by the US government. During the 1940s and 1950s, the culture of photography gradually formed toward becoming one of the most trustworthy mediums of delivering real news to the people against the backdrop of World War II. Without satellite facilities or advanced cameras, archiving the atomic blasts solely depended on first-hand experiences and witnesses. There was a famous photograph taken from above right after dropping the bomb. Still, there was no evidence of what happened beneath it as the atomic explosion destroyed everything.

Akira Mizuta Lippit, in her book *Atomic Light* (2005), talks about the need for a new mode of inscriptions to record the aftermath of the blasts in Japan. The blasts left their brutal mark by almost entirely destroying a nation. The graphic projection of such a horrific incident was carried by every living human being through various marks. The atomic bomb was printed on their body like a graphic design. Lippit writes, "Atomic irradiation can be seen as having created a type of violent photography directly onto the surfaces of the human body" (Lippit 2005, 92).

The atomic blasts took the lives of more than 250000 people (about half the population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). In the following years, the impact of the radiation kept haunting the survivors with cancer, leukemia, and perpetual disability as its side effects. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), one of the leading non-governmental organizations in one of their archives, "Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombings" describes, "The uranium bomb detonated over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 had an explosive yield equal to 15,000 tonnes of TNT. It razed and burnt around 70 per cent of all buildings and caused an estimated 140,000 deaths by the end of 1945, along with increased rates of cancer and chronic disease among the survivors" (ICAN, web page). They also have given a detail how of a "slightly larger plutonium bomb exploded over Nagasaki three days later levelled 6.7 sq km. of the city and killed 74,000 people by the end of 1945. Ground temperatures reached 4,000°C and radioactive rain poured down" (ibid).

Within a few seconds, Hiroshima and Nagasaki faced the terror of being entirely wiped out from the world map as everything turned pitch black. The horror was unimaginable and unseen ever before. Lippit calls this "avisuality," "a visuality without images, an unimaginable visuality, and images without visuality" (Lippit 2005, 109). There cannot be any "authentic photography" of the atomic war because "the bombings themselves were

a form of total photography, testing the very visibility of the visual" (ibid). This avisuality, both as a concept and a construct, dragged on even after years of people returning to normalcy. The survivors still are living embodiments of the terrors forcibly imposed on them. Keiji Nakazawa's nonfictional autobiography *I Saw It* acts as a "counterinscription" to give materiality to "avisuality" that Lippit discussed in her book. These books function as a resistance towards the avisuality caused by the atomic bomb.

Writer's Responsibility

Yōtarō Konaka in her essay "Japanese Atomic-Bomb Literature" (1988) while discussing the emergence of atomic-bomb literature writes that the Holocaust was an infamous event where Jews were victimized. But in case of the dropping of the bombs, Japan was taught a lesson for starting the war. It was more of an attempt to end the war by punishing the Japanese people. The people of Japan were not victims, they were the ones initiating World War II. Therefore, it was the right decision to punish them for their deeds by experimenting the nuclear bombs on their people. Konaka pens down, "the two bombs that were dropped in August of 1945 not only ended the world war but also sounded a tragic alarm for mankind, ringing in the nuclear age" (Konaka 1988, 424). She also mentioned why it was so important to talk about the atomic blast to the world. While

reading Naruhiko Itō's first-hand witness in *Shikabane no machi/City of Corpses*) (1948) where the author shares her experiences, the challenges she faced while writing the book. The book shares an interesting anecdote as Konaka also writes,

> And corpses were lying all over, left and right, and in the middle of the road. Some were lying face upward and others face down, all of them had been headed toward the hospital. With their bulging eyes, swollen and battered lips, and bloated limbs, they were like hideous big rubber dolls. Weeping copiously, I recorded the image of those people on my heart. (ibid)

Itō records what she sees. It was a difficult task to write about people who have lost their forms but are somehow still alive like deadly huge plastic dolls. They were running towards the hospital without having any idea whether such a place existed anymore or not. This event was extremely difficult to write what Itō witnessed, the shedding of human fleshes while they frantically marched towards getting medical attention. The question that naturally occurs to the mind of the reader is: How can someone write about such things? Why was it necessary to pass down such horror to the next generation? Itō answers **"Having seen these things, I must write about them at some time. It is a writer's responsibility"** (ibid). The writer must have the responsibility of explaining what he/she has witnessed to pass it on to the future generation. More importantly, to remember how

the people of Nagasaki and Hiroshima were left to die.

Similar to Naruhiko Itō, Nakazawa Keiji, used the back of the then movie posters to draw cartoons. Amidst poverty, malnutrition, losing close ones, Keiji nourished his passion for drawing what he has seen as it is always the author's responsibility to write about the horror that people of Japan faced during the blasts. Keiji's descriptions of people after the blast are also like Itō. Also, there is one more writer, Masuji Ibuse whose novel *Koroi ame/Black Rain* (1989) is in a way an inspiration for Nakazawa to continue his "Black" series consisting of: "The Black River Flows," "Beyond Black Silence," "A Flock of Black Pigeons," and "Black Flies." The "black" series presented presents the truth of the violent attacks in Japan.

Hibakusha, Censorship and the Politics of Silencing

In an interview, Asai Montofumi, the President of Hiroshima Peace Institute, asked Nakazawa about the discrimination he faced and how his experience when he was forced to live a painful life for eternity. In his book *Hiroshima: Autobiography of Barefoot Gen* (2010), Nakazawa responded that he had vehemently faced discrimination mainly because he was not allowed to discuss it. The atomic bomb survivors could not talk about their victimization openly. He also mentioned how people committed suicide while facing discrimination daily. Na-

kazawa also explained how people used to get agitated even if he was sad for other reasons and told him openly, "Don't put on your bomb-victim face!" (Nakazawa, 2010, 275). Nakazawa feels that people looked down upon the victims of the atomic bomb in a threatening manner. People were not even ready to hear what the people of Japan had to say to them. Only after the World Convention to remove nuclear weapons in 1955 did the victims come out and start sharing their stories. However, Nakazawa still received questions like, "Did such things really happen?" (177). These remarks highlight people's indifference toward knowing the truth of Japan.

ICAN, in one of their archives, titled, "The Hibakusha's Decades Long Journey to Ban Nuclear Weapons," painfully writes about Hiroshima that people are not ready to face, "Grotesquely wounded people, they were bleeding, burnt, blackened and swollen. Parts of their bodies were missing. Flesh and skin hung from their bones. Some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands. Some with their bellies burst open, their intestines hanging out. The foul stench of burnt human flesh filled the air" (ICAN, web page). This incident took place within 1.8 kilometers of the epicenter in Hiroshima.

This discrimination is known as *hibakusha* or the bomb affected people, or the survivors of the a-bomb in Japan. *Hibakusha* are the survivors who didn't die instantaneously but carried forward the post-traumatic stress

disorder for years and eventually died of either cancer or leukemia. Elaine Natalie and Katie Yoon in their article, "Hibakusha: The Human Cost of Nuclear Weapons" (2021), discusses the negative sides of the coinage of the term. They write, "Fears of transmitting genetic illnesses further heightened the stigma associated with the hibakusha and their families, especially amid a leukemia wave during the aftermath of the bombings. Hibakusha were forcibly displaced and settled in "atomic slums" (genbaku suramu), experiencing years of deprivation and isolation" (Natalie and Yoon, 2021, web page). The last generation worked ceaselessly as advocates for the abolition of nuclear bomb and peace. Sadly, Japan did not sign the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Events, which came into force on January 22, 2021.

In her book *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (2016), Hillary Chute discusses that there was a censorship imposed in Japan by the U.S. government not to share the aftermath of the blasts. Christian Hong in her essay, "Flashforward Democracy: American Exceptionalism and the Atomic Bomb in *Barefoot Gen*" (2009) writes, "If not with unconcern then with a spirit of triumph, the US public, shielded in the early post-war years from graphic images of human ruin, hailed the atomic decimation of Japan" (Hong 2009, 126). The American response to the discrimination and the loss shows their apathy towards this small country whose life did matter less to their cause of posing as a

superior country in front of others. Quite surprisingly, it was put into effect by both the countries as the people of Japan too wanted to hide their tales of suffering as well as exposure to the atomic blasts. Therefore, the picture of the famous mushroom cloud after the blasts was symptomatic of the form of abstraction to promote the prowess of the United States government and their policies regarding the Cold War. Hong writes, how against "this image's inadequacy as a representative the document, there have been countervailing attempts to privilege narration from a different deictic position, the "here" of the explosion versus the "there," so as to present the neglected human dimension of the atomic bombings (ibid). Unlike Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993) and Art Spigelman's *Maus*, Nakazawa's story did not spread worldwide because the world policies and politics prevented the nation to raise its voice and point out their suffering to the world outside.

Perhaps for this reason as Chute discusses, there was a culture of silence being practiced by both the USA and Japan. Nakazawa had to go through a series of rejections before his graphic memoir got published in book form. He also had to publish them in erotic magazines to avoid censorship. His first graphic depiction of the atomic blast is "Pelted by Black Rain" (1988) which was published first in *Manga Punch*, a famous magazine for youngsters. This graphic account was a fictional one. Similar to the underground comix culture Nakazawa embraced the

subculture of manga in Japan to make his stories heard in front of the readers. Chute writes, "An angry, hard-boiled genre story about a young bomb victim, "Pelted by Black Rain" was completed in 1966 and rejected by major commercial publishers for years until *Manga Punch* took it on despite the editor's expressed fears that both he and Nakazawa would be arrested by the CIA" (Chute 2016, 116). The book went through a series of rejections for its content. Being a victim of hibakusha for so long a desperate survivor such as Nakazawa went for the "third-rate," the "lowbrow" magazines to express his views on the atomic bomb because **"even if it wasn't one of the major magazines, wouldn't it do if it just got read?"** (Chute 2016, 177; emaphasis author's). Finally, the publisher of the pornographic magazine Manga Punch took the risk and published his story.

Materializing Mother's Bones: An Obituary

This book is not merely the artist's responsibility for what he has seen but also an obituary where the artist wants to pay his mother's debts. The book's foundation lies in Nakazawa's determination to recreate his mother's bones that the bomb deprived him of. Chute discusses that Nakazawa needed to write this book as a tribute to his mother. Her decimation of bones was a turning point in the life of Nakazawa as he was not left with anything to hold on to. As a cartoonist, more importantly, an artist-writer, he wished to recreate his mother's

bones that were deprived by the bomb. By drawing her on the page as Chute writes "creating work about witnessing the atomic bomb that preserves, archives, and makes material his experience in the face of the war that decimated the very materiality of his mother (Chute 2016, 125). Throughout the book, Nakazawa explains the importance of her mother in his life. He believes he would have been a criminal if his mom was not there as a support system that helped him pursue his study and love for cartoons. It was shocking when his mother died, and he came to Japan to collect her ashes. His life was finally taking a good turn when his mother died. Nakazawa remembers that he could not get anything back from his mother's corpses at the crematorium. He has seen his father's bones and his siblings' skeletons, but his mother's bones completely disintegrated. He writes, "I couldn't find even her skull. Thinking this couldn't be so, I rummaged for all I was worth. There were only occasional white fragments" (176). This incident played a crucial role in his life because he channeled his anger and frustration into writing a book about the atomic bomb. The deprivation of his mother's bones propelled him to confront the nuclear bomb even more.

However, Chute asks as important question, "What does it mean to materialize history? What does it mean to mark out of a desire to render history concrete?" (Chute 2016, 26). There is an analysis that might be fitting to these questions, as sometimes drawing can be trans-

formed into something else, something bigger in the articulation of history. As William Kentridge writes in his essay "Double Lines," "I have come to think of drawing as a form of projection. So it isn't really a matter of making drawings of things in preparation for something else, but of *making drawing literally into other things*" (ibid). As Chute describes "Drawing is not just mimetic: it is its own artifact, substance, thing, phenomenology" (Chute 2016, 27). Drawing history from memories is an act of building something where you are not provided with any material to work on. Materializing "history through the work of marks on the page creates it as space and substance, gives it a corporeality, a physical shape—like a suit, perhaps, for an absent body, or to make evident the kind of space-time many bodies move in and move through; to make, in other words, the twisting lines of history legible through form" (ibid). In Nakazawa's case, after his mother's death, he decided finally to use manga as a weapon and a medium to relive his past and recreate them on the pages. However, like the Freudian concept of the fort-da game in Nakazawa's narrative, there is a constant struggle between presence and absence in the process of re-creating because the blast not only left its impact on the places but also on people's memories.

Enola Gay

Nakazawa's, I Saw It visually depicts pika/flash when the child narrator first sighted the bomb, Enola Gay. The

sudden blow of the a-bomb causes spine-chilling darkness. As has been shown, the child narrator was shielded by the collision of a wall meant to kill him. While gradually regaining consciousness, the child narrator was overwhelmed by a pitch-dark silhouette painting the fate of the awe-stricken nation. The child, however, died of malnutrition and a radioactive environment around the nation. The blow of the a-bomb killed the woman the child narrator spoke to a few moments ago. Due to the high-pitched explosion, Nakazawa's mother gave birth to a daughter out of shock. Chute writes, "the panels of the bombing and its immediate aftermath unfold unhurriedly, cataloguing carefully, graphically, the effects of the bomb as the child observes them, each page a fresh encounter with bodies ruined in extra- ordinary ways" (Chute 2016, 124). The gross images and the brutality of the event with people's melted bodies are too difficult to watch. The grotesque images result from what Nakazawa has witnessed with his own eyes. The reality of such an event being expressed in a medium such as manga is challenging. Nakazawa also emphasizes the importance of form and farming in his narratives. As an artist-writer, he creates tension between the verbal and visual modalities. The readers are constantly agitated by the violence they expect to encounter in this book.

The Shadow of Photography

Paul Virilio in his book *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (1989) discusses that the nuclear bomb was a

light weapon that captured the face of trauma and left its print. Virilio writes, "If photography, according to its inventor Nicéphore Niépce, was simply a method of engraving with light" where "bodies inscribed their traces by virtue of their own luminosity, nuclear weapons inherited both the darkroom of Niépce and Daguerre and the military searchlight" (Virilio 1989, 8). There is a connection between nuclear warfare and photography. As mentioned earlier, Lippit in her book *Atomic Light* (2005) writes that there are many forms of documentaries on comics but only a few could "have pointed out that the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were *light-weapons* that prefigured the enhanced-radiation neutron bomb, the directed-beam laser weapons, and the charged-particle guns" (Lippit 2005, 92). Lippit writes, "a negative photography is possible in the atomic arena, a skiagraphy, a shadow photography. The shadow of photography" (Lippit 2005, 95). Hiroshima and Nagasaki both the places became shadows of photography.

Hillary Chute attaches her valuable comments that Nakazawa's book was a counter-inscription to the camera culture of documenting. Chute writes, "its comics form signifies the bodily in the act of making marks against the techne of bodies marked and vaporized by the bomb's light. To the removed, clinical, superlatively high-technology mode of inscription" (Chute 2016, 36). Chute has always been vocal about using comics as a counter-hegemony to the hegemonic world literature that denies comics its worth and treats comics as propa-

ganda. This shadow and light dichotomy forced Nakazawa to think of it as an option, an opportunity to witness and document. But Nakazawa relied on his memory and retraced everything, places, faces, or events. Materializing history from scraps thereby is a difficult job that Nakazawa this with passion because he had to make the trauma faced by his mother and the people of Japan visible to audiences worldwide. As Chute puts it Nakazawa's "desire is to make absent appear" (Chute 2016, 27). His comics and hand-drawn images are "counter burning," forcing his readers to engage, live and relive the realities of the blasts with him.

Thomas LaMarre in his essay, "Manga Bomb: Between the Lines of Barefoot Gen" (2010), writes about Nakazawa's unique style of writing this graphic narrative, as he writes, "its use of a conventional manga style to depict an event that is often deemed to be unrepresentable in its violence and trauma" (LaMarre 2010, 262). Nakazawa's fictional encounter of the a-bomb in Barefoot Gen "invites us to address not only the experience of survivors of Hiroshima but also to consider what manga expression brings to our understanding of the atomic bomb, war, and trauma" (ibid). The difference between I Saw It and Gen is everything is amplified in the latter and there is a sense of plasticity prevalent in Gen. LaMarre comments "Barefoot Gen works through the dynamics of the "plastic line", which contributes to its articulation of a politics in which vitality and resil-

ience do not appear to reside outside historical violence but seem to emerge with it" (ibid). To this Chute added, "The mark in Nakazawa's work is both itself etched and longing to be etched, then—to burn inside a reader's brain" (Chute 138).

Banality of Violence

It is almost next to impossible to talk about the survivors without mentioning the bomb. Lisa Yoneyama in her essay "On Testimonial Practices" (1999) writes, "identity of a hibakusha as a one-dimensional speaking subject was constituted by prioritizing the speaker's ontological relationship to the bomb over his or her numerous other social relationships and positions" (Yoneyama 1999, 85). As if they lacked a life of their own. In Hiroshima Traces, Yoneyama further discusses, "One does not automatically become a witness (*shogensha*) or a storyteller (*kataribe*) simply by telling personal memories to public audiences. Such self-definition is accompanied by an attempt to critically intervene in given cultural and social contexts," also, "the survivors assigned themselves the responsibility of conveying their personal memories of Hiroshima's atomic obliteration to the general public, they did so out of a sense of urgency and with a great deal of self-awareness about the act of telling the past. In the process, many of these storytellers have come to question the given discursive arrangements that have structured first-person accounts of the atomic disaster"

(86). They reveal what they have faced out of self-awareness, a sense of duty to the nation and to become a part of the act of witnessing and, documenting their stories. Yoneyama writes, "the conventional narratives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have often established the survivors as speaking subjects, while at the same time subjecting them to the regimes of truth production in national and legal-bureaucratic procedures, in medical and psychiatric investigations, and in the then-powerful oppositional discursive paradigm of the peace and antinuclear movement" (ibid). Yoneyama questions the politics of naming terms such as hibakusha, witness, story-teller, survivor and is trying to understand the contexts and purposes behind using them because "the awareness of becoming a witness/storyteller was necessarily linked to the decolonization of the language with which to speak of oneself" (ibid).

Yoneyama is sometimes scared that by making everything available to people, the actual pain somewhere becomes the prey of sensational news in today's media. She discusses how the survivors were divided. Some related to the media exposure to share their stories with the rest of the world, while others shied away. She writes,

> Yet some survivors have despised those who would thus expose their experiences, believing that the mass media's sensationalized treatment of the survivors' stories trivializes even the experience of nuclear dev-

> astation by turning them into commodities. Such critics see publicly representing memories of the bomb as betraying the past moment of deaths and suffering that they alone have witnessed. (87-88)

Thereby, there is a reluctance to disclose what they have witnessed. The survivors' reluctance to speak is often regarded as authentication of the experience. Yoneyama mentions, "Children of survivors frequently claim that their parents completely suppressed stories of the bomb. A newspaper corporation worker, for instance, remembered that his father, whose entire family—including his first wife and all their children—was killed by the bomb, never uttered a word about the experience during his lifetime" (88). However, contrary to this reluctance and fear of being unable to express what he had seen, Nakazawa excels in documenting pain and trauma through this multimodal media. He was conscious of not making his work one-dimensional, as Yoneyama mentioned. That is why in the book, the sequence of atomic blasts appears only after page 249. The book presents trauma and suffering but is never dominated by the nuclear explosion alone. For example, as it has been already raised as an issue, *I Saw It* and *Gen* series have a tendency of assimilating violence with banality. As Hillary Chute simplifies it,

> Their works are driven by such traumatic events, these events are not isolated; their works also bear witness through words and images to the everyday—

> to the ordinary and to the scenes of enunciation that produce the acts of witness. These are works in which the objects of witness operate on scales both large and small. Motivated by crisis, they bear witness to lived experience that is often shaped by crisis but is not necessarily fully dictated by it. Nakazawa's work, for example, is highly attuned to the rhythms of daily family life both before and after the bomb. (Chute 2016, 29)

Thereby, these works function in many ways, the writer himself being a witness, as is Nakazawa, the writer penning down someone else's testimony, Spiegelman and Joe Sacco, and the writers participating in the act of witnessing, all of them did this.

Questioning the Medium and its Approaches

Interestingly, the characters are hauntingly pretty in a traumatic memoir such as Nakazawa's. Art Spiegelman, while discussing Nakazawa's oeuvre, wrote in the introductory section of the First Volume of Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima (2004), "Gen haunts me. . . . Gen burned its way into my heated brain with all the intensity of a fever-dream" (Nakazawa 2004, 2). The event is gruesome but all the characters even after the blast appear beautiful with big eyes and pretty faces. The physiognomy of characters has been looked on with a negative angle by Spiegelman, as he writes, the characters often "leans to the cloyingly cute, with special

emphasis on Disney-like oversized Caucasian eyes and generally neotenic faces. Nakazawa is hardly the worst offender, though his cartoon style derives from that tradition. His craftmanship is somewhat graceless, even homely, and without much nuance, but it gets the job done" (Nakazawa 2004, 2-3). Following the tradition of Robert Crumb's tradition of telling the truth in a simpler style, Spiegelman concludes his introductory note by saying, "The drawing's greatest virtue is straightforward, blunt sincerity. Its conviction and honesty allow you to believe in the unbelievable and impossible things that indeed happen in Hiroshima. It is the inexorable art of the witness" (3).

Marjane Satrapi's memoir *Persepolis* (2004) represents a child's perception of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran through a minimalist approach. In *Comics Journal* Tim O'Neil criticized Marjane Satrapi's approach in Persepolis. He argues, "Marjane Satrapi is not a very good cartoonist—I think I should say that up front so there's no confusion on the matter" (O'Neil 2004, 37). In her book *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics* (2010), Hillary Chute defends Satrapi by saying, "Proficiency in realistic drawing is not necessarily the goal of any given narrative. Rather, graphic narrative is about the discursive presentation of time as space on the page" (Chute 2010, 146). Satrapi herself informs her interviewer David Hajdu, "Cartoonists shouldn't have to be good. . . . The technical quality is not what matters"

(Hajdu 2004, 34-35). Therefore, the cartoons do not matter, but the audience must scrutinize and understand the story and narrative they bring along.

New Seeing: Defamiliarization

The question that needs to be raised is why and how comics offer a new way of seeing. How does comics present history in a defamiliarized way? How does the act of insisting on an event's authenticity and its defamiliarized representation go hand in hand? Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan in their book *Literary theory: an anthology* (2004), writes,

> literature would be considered not as a window on the world but as something with a palpability of its own which arrests the eye and merits study. The manipulation of representational devices may create a semblance of reality and allow one to have the impression of gazing through glass, but it is the devices alone that produce that impression, and they alone are what makes literature literary. (Rivkin and Ryan 2004, 3)

They both call this a new way of seeing that makes literature literary. Art Spiegelman in *Maus* provides a new way of seeing by applying the anthropomorphic approach. Joe Sacco captures the quotidian life of the middle east suffering and destruction with his unique ability to render past, present and various testimonies on the same

page same panel. It is a struggle to read Sacco's tags and understand his footnotes and humor simultaneously.

Interestingly, with Nakazawa, the approach is entirely different. His seeing brutality is gruesome when compared with others. He has witnessed people's peeled skins, pus, wounds, and corpses like never before. He presents a new way of seeing injuries that would force the reader to be hooked on the pages and not shy away from or ignore such violence. Hillary Chute's explanatory commentary would be highly essential as she writes,

> The first has to do with visual witnessing, the way that comics can offer an absorptive intimacy with their narratives while defamiliarizing received images of history. *I Saw It* and "Maus" are both narratives of terror that devolve on images of terror: the zombie-like, decomposing citizens of Hiroshima that Nakazawa witnessed firsthand; and the corpses, both pictured and implied, that people the Spiegelman son's visual reconstruction of his father's death-camp testimony. We might think of approaching World War II, after the broad silence that surrounded the war in America and in Japan, as mandating afresh Shklovsky's "new seeing" of reality. Comics picks up steam in the early 1970s as this new seeing. (Chute 2016, 142)

She also writes, "Motivated by the urgencies of re-seeing or re-visioning the war, comics sought to defamiliarize

received images of history, and also to communicate, to circulate in realms of the popular" (ibid). WWII came up with violence in abundance, and people witnessed trauma like never before. Such trauma is so extreme that people are numbed by it. Expressing them in words or drawing photos reminded them of the trauma they wanted to forget and get on with what they had. However, victims and survivors like Nakazawa felt the urge to make the world accustomed to the culture of expressing what they had seen and faced. Nakazawa, like his contemporaries, made violence banal, a perpetually lived reality for the rest of his life, and a new way of seeing and reliving those memories by making the invisible visible to the eyes of the people, by making his mother's bones recreated on the pages.

Using this medium, an artist-writer can recreate lost bodies inside the drawn lines of comics. The characters are resurrected on the page through various marks. Chute writes, "The corporeality of the work comes to stand in for the missing corporeality of the dead parent, eviscerated by war" (142). Both Anja Spiegelman and Kimie Nakazawa survived the war. However, it eventually killed them. Spiegelman's mother committed suicide in 1968, while Nakazawa's mother died of leukemia in 1966. Therefore, "the Holocaust is motivation for Spiegelman to reconstruct Holocaust testimony" and for Nakazawa, "the decimation of his mother's body from atomic radiation—its complete deconstitution—is also the reason

he decides to embark on a career of testimonial visibility" (142-3).

To conclude, the research paper aims to highlight the role of comics and the discursive potential of choosing a memoir as its subject. Chute's commentary is concurrent with the theme as she writes, "The spatial features of comics, such as its activation of the space between word and image and its erection of literal drawn frames alongside its breaking and violation of them, presents a grammar that can inscribe trauma not just thematically" but also visibly through words and images (Chute 2016, 34-35). Thereby, the spatial features of comics helps the artist-writer build his narrative and materialize his memory. Interestingly, every aspect associated with comics helps the writer and reader understand different approaches and decode hidden meanings from the format. Nakazawa's use of strokes, colors, pages, even smudgy page numbering, framing, dismembered panels, mushroom thought balloons, and this entire grammar structure of comics help the artist-writer build a narrative opportunity for the readers to understand the representation of violence throughout the text.

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Margins of the Empire: An Exploration of Exclusion and Marginalization in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*

Arpan Mitra

Michael Ondaatje (born 1943) is a writer whose works explore complex themes related to identity, history, and power. One recurring theme in Ondaatje's writing is the politics of exclusion and marginalization, particularly in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism. Through his exploration of these themes, Ondaatje offers important insights into the experiences of marginalized communities and the ways in which power dynamics shape individual and collective identity in the postcolonial world.

At the heart of Ondaatje's writing is a deep understanding of the complexities of identity. As a Sri Lankan-Ca-

nadian writer, Ondaatje has a unique perspective on the tensions between colonizer and colonized, and the ways in which these power dynamics shape individual and collective identity. His works often feature characters who are marginalized and excluded, either because of their ethnicity, class, or social status. Through his portrayal of these characters, Ondaatje challenges readers to consider the ways in which their own identities are shaped by larger social and historical forces.

In this paper, I will explore the politics of exclusion and marginalization in Michael Ondaatje's works, focusing on two of his most acclaimed novels, In the *Skin of a Lion* (2017) and *The English Patient* (2018). I will examine the ways in which Ondaatje portrays the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism. Using postcolonial theory as a framework for analysis, I will explore the ways in which Ondaatje's works engage with broader questions of power, identity, and resistance. Through this analysis, I will argue that Ondaatje's writing offers important insights into the experiences of marginalized communities, and the ways in which these experiences are shaped by broader political and historical forces.

Overall, this paper will offer a comprehensive analysis of the politics of exclusion and marginalization in Michael Ondaatje's works, demonstrating the ways in which his writing speaks to broader questions of power,

identity, and resistance. By examining the ways in which Ondaatje portrays the experiences of marginalized communities, this paper will contribute to our understanding of the complexities of identity in the postcolonial world, and the ways in which larger social and historical forces shape individual and collective identity.

Postcolonial Theory and Ondaatje's Works

Ondaatje's works are deeply influenced by postcolonial theory, which explores the legacies of colonialism and the dynamics of power in postcolonial societies. In *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient,* Ondaatje uses postcolonial theory to critique dominant power structures and to explore the ways in which marginalized individuals can resist their exclusion and assert their agency.

One of the key postcolonial theories that is relevant to Ondaatje's works is Edward Said's concept of orientalism. Orientalism refers to the ways in which Western cultures construct and represent non-Western cultures as exotic and inferior. In *The English Patient*, Ondaatje explores the ways in which the English patient's identity is constructed through Orientalist representations of the "other": "He was a dark god come out of the desert, and with the black-masked Bedouin he had followed the stars and arrived where he was now" (Ondaatje 2018, 19).

The English patient's identity is constructed through Orientalist representations of the exotic and mysterious "other." Ondaatje uses this to critique the ways in which identity is constructed through the exclusion and marginalization of non-Western cultures.

Another key postcolonial theory that is relevant to Ondaatje's works is Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Hybridity refers to the ways in which cultures mix and interact with each other, creating new forms of identity that challenge dominant power structures. In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje explores the ways in which identity is shaped through hybridity and how marginalized individuals can assert their agency through hybrid identities: "He was the beloved of Patrick Lewis, son of Ambrose, who had built the Queen's Park Bridge and of Temelcoff, the Macedonian who had first carved the stone lions" (Ondaatje 2017, 135).

This passage highlights the ways in which Patrick Lewis, a member of the dominant colonial society, is linked to Temelcoff, a Macedonian immigrant. The hybridity of their relationship challenges the dominant narrative of colonial superiority and highlights the ways in which marginalized individuals can assert their agency through hybrid identities. Ondaatje employs the theory of hybridity to challenge dominant narratives of cultural purity and the exclusion of minority cultures from the dominant discourse. In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje

highlights the ways in which Patrick Lewis's hybrid identity challenges dominant narratives of colonial superiority and empowers marginalized individuals to assert their agency through the mastery of skills and knowledge.

A third significant postcolonial theory that is relevant to Ondaatje's works is Frantz Fanon's concept of the colonial gaze. The colonial gaze refers to the ways in which colonial societies construct and represent non-European peoples as inferior and exotic. In *The English Patient*, Ondaatje critiques the colonial gaze and explores the ways in which it is used to construct the English patient's identity: "They think that it is a god who has come down from the sky to give them help. . . They do not believe it is a man like themselves who is bringing this fire" (Ondaatje 2018, 25).

This passage highlights the ways in which the colonial gaze constructs the English patient's identity as godlike and exotic, reinforcing the dominant narrative of European superiority. Ondaatje critiques this construction of identity and highlights the ways in which it is used to exclude and marginalize non-European peoples.

Postcolonial theories have been instrumental in shaping Michael Ondaatje's works, which explore themes of identity, power, and exclusion in the postcolonial context. Ondaatje engages with a range of postcolonial theories in his literary works, including hybridity, subalterni-

ty, and cultural nationalism, to explore the complexities of postcolonial identity and the ways in which marginalized individuals can resist their exclusion and assert their agency.

Another postcolonial theory that Ondaatje engages with is the idea of subalternity. Subalternity is a theory that explores the ways in which marginalized individuals are excluded from dominant discourses and the ways in which they can resist their exclusion and assert their agency. In *The English Patient*, Ondaatje creates the character of Kip to explore the complexities of subaltern identity and the ways in which marginalized individuals can resist their exclusion through the mastery of skills and knowledge. Kip's identity is shaped by his Indian heritage, his military training, and his interest in defusing bombs. He is excluded from the dominant discourse of Western knowledge and expertise, but he uses his mastery of his skills and knowledge to assert his agency and resist his exclusion. As Ondaatje writes, "He was a sapper. He understood the explosive mathematics of time and matter. It was a comfort" (Ondaatje 2018, 142).

Ondaatje also engages with the postcolonial theory of cultural nationalism, which explores the ways in which cultural identity is shaped by nationalist ideologies and discourses. In Running in the Family, Ondaatje explores his own family history and the ways in which his Sri Lankan identity has been shaped by the legacy of Brit-

ish colonialism and the nationalist discourses of postcolonial Sri Lanka. Ondaatje writes, "In Colombo they had insisted on speaking English. We were never taught our parents' native tongue. Their Anglicizing, in a way, had encouraged the thieving of our heritage" (Ondaatje 2011, 18). Ondaatje's work challenges the dominant discourse of cultural nationalism and the exclusion of minority cultures.

Ondaatje's exploration of postcolonial theories extends beyond the aforementioned works, with a notable focus on depicting marginalized and excluded communities within postcolonial societies. In *Anil's Ghost*, for example, Ondaatje explores the experiences of Sri Lankan Tamils during the civil war, and the challenges they face in asserting their identities in a context of violent conflict and political instability.

Ondaatje also engages with the postcolonial theory of third space, which refers to the creation of new cultural identities through the encounter between different cultures. In *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), Ondaatje uses the figure of Billy the Kid to explore the complex cultural interactions that occur in the American West, as European settlers encounter Native American and Mexican cultures. Through the character of Billy, Ondaatje creates a third space of hybrid identity, which is neither fully Western nor fully Indigenous or Mexican.

Ondaatje actively explores the concept of mimicry within postcolonial theory, which highlights how colonized individuals employ the cultural customs of the colonizer to assert their own agency and resist colonial domination. In *Divisadero* (2009), Ondaatje explores the complex relationships between American and European cultures, and the ways in which they influence and shape each other. Through the characters of Anna and Coop, who are both performers of American and European music and literature, Ondaatje creates a space of cultural hybridity, where the boundaries between cultures are blurred and contested.

The Politics of Exclusion and Marginalization in The English Patient

The English Patient is set in the aftermath of World War II and explores the complexities of identity and power in a postcolonial world. The novel focuses on the character of the English patient, a man who has been badly burned in a plane crash and is being cared for by a Canadian nurse, Hana, in an abandoned Italian villa. The English patient's identity is unclear, and he is initially believed to be an Englishman. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that he is actually a Hungarian count who fought with the Germans during the war. The novel explores the ways in which identity is constructed and how it is influenced by the complex power dynamics of colonialism and war.

Ondaatje's exploration of identity and power is particularly evident in the character of Kip, an Indian sapper who works for the British army. Kip is a skilled sapper, responsible for detecting and defusing landmines, but he is also acutely aware of the ways in which his identity is at odds with the dominant culture of the British military. Ondaatje writes: "He was a foreigner in the army, and more a foreigner in the army now that they had moved into Italy. His face was too dark for them. The military sense of humor was beyond him, as was the humor of a city like Florence" (Ondaatje 2018, 82).

This passage highlights the ways in which Kip is excluded from the dominant culture of the British army, and how his racial identity marks him as different and alien in the context of the war. Kip's experiences reflect the broader tensions between the West and the East that are explored throughout the novel.

Kip's position as a colonial subject in the British army puts him in a complex position of power and subjugation. Kip can assert his agency and resist his marginalization through his mastery of bomb defusing: "Kip knew how to do this work better than the English. It was a small pleasure to have something that they did not have, to be superior in a practical thing" (Ondaatje 2018, 177). Kip's mastery of bomb defusing is a way for him to assert his agency and challenge the dominant narrative of colonial inferiority. His ability to do this work bet-

ter than the English also highlights the ways in which colonial subjects are often excluded from positions of power, despite their expertise and knowledge.

Another key way in which the novel engages with issues of exclusion and marginalization is through its exploration of the relationship between the West and the Middle East. The titular English patient, for example, is revealed to be Count Almásy, a Hungarian explorer who is enamored with the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East. Through Almásy's experiences, the novel explores the ways in which the West has historically exoticized and romanticized the Middle East, even as it has exploited and oppressed the region. Ondaatje writes: "He falls in love with the desert the way a woman falls in love with a man, even if it is a doomed love, even if it is a dangerous love" (Ondaatje 2018, 96). This passage highlights the ways in which Almásy's relationship with the desert is romanticized and fetishized, even as it remains a site of violence and oppression.

In addition to exploring the dynamics of power and identity in a postcolonial world, The English Patient also critiques the notion of a unified European identity. Ondaatje uses the character of the English patient to highlight the fragmented nature of European identity and the ways in which it is constructed through colonialism and war: "He knew he was European, but he did not know what that meant anymore. The wars had mixed

everything up, torn off the fabric of borders, left only small groups of people surviving in hollows" (Ondaatje 2018, 143).

The English patient's sense of confusion about his European identity highlights the ways in which colonialism and war have fragmented and destabilized the concept of European identity. Ondaatje critiques the notion of a unified European identity and highlights the ways in which it is constructed through the exclusion and marginalization of non-European peoples. Through the experiences of the characters, Ondaatje explores the complex relationships between the West and the Middle East, as well as the ways in which individuals negotiate their identities in the face of cultural and social pressures.

The English Patient is a complex novel that addresses various themes related to exclusion and marginalization. The character of Hana, a nurse who cares for the English patient, also highlights the complexities of identity in the postcolonial context. Hana is half-Indian and half-English, a product of the colonizer and the colonized. This hybrid identity leaves her feeling disconnected from both cultures, and she struggles to reconcile her conflicting identities. Ondaatje writes:

> Her mother had been a daughter of British colonial administrators in India and her father was an Indian

> who worked with the British. Hana had grown up in Italy but spoke English with an Indian accent, the oddity of her heritage confusing both sides of her ancestry. She was a hybrid with no fixed identity, and this made her unstable in her world, prone to wander. (Ondaatje 2018, 21)

This passage highlights the challenges of negotiating identity in the postcolonial context, particularly for those who are products of colonialism and hybridity. Hana's experiences reflect the broader tension between colonizer and colonized, and the ways in which these power dynamics shape individual identity.

The novel also explores issues related to the colonial exploitation of the Middle East, particularly in the character of Caravaggio, a Canadian thief and spy who has had his thumbs cut off by the Germans. Caravaggio's experiences reveal the ways in which Western powers have historically exploited and oppressed the Middle East, using it as a pawn in their geopolitical struggles. Ondaatje writes: "He thought of the British and Germans competing in Baghdad for influence, the stupidity of that power struggle. All he saw was a land used as a screen on which the West projected its fantasies and fears" (Ondaatje 2018, 144).

This passage highlights the ways in which the Middle East has been reduced to a site of projection for West-

ern powers, rather than a region with its own rich history and culture. Caravaggio's experiences reflect the broader legacy of colonialism and imperialism, and the ways in which Western powers continue to exploit and marginalize other regions and cultures.

The English Patient is a postcolonial novel that engages with issues of exclusion and marginalization, particularly in the context of the relationships between the West and the Middle East. Through the experiences of characters like Hana and Caravaggio, the novel explores the complexities of identity in the postcolonial context, as well as the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Ondaatje's exploration of these themes offers important insights into the experiences of marginalized communities and the ways in which global power dynamics continue to shape individual and collective identity in the postcolonial world.

The Politics of Exclusion and Marginalization in *In the Skin of a Lion*

In the Skin of a Lion, a novel by Michael Ondaatje, can be read as a postcolonial work that explores issues of exclusion and marginalization. The novel focuses on the experiences of immigrants and labourers who worked on the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct and other major projects in Toronto during the early 20th century. Through the character of Patrick Lewis, a young man

who immigrates to Canada from the backwoods of Ontario, the novel explores the challenges that immigrants and labourers face in asserting their identities and finding a place in Canadian society.

One of the key themes in the novel is the exclusion of immigrant and working-class communities from mainstream Canadian society. This exclusion is reflected in the physical space of the city, which is divided into distinct neighbourhoods that are defined by social class and ethnicity. The immigrant and working-class communities are marginalized and excluded from the dominant culture, and must struggle to find their own voice and identity in the face of this exclusion. Ondaatje writes:

> The city was a place of thresholds and passages, of entrances and exits, of bridges and tunnels, and of corridors which led from one interior to another. The immigrants who had helped to build it, however, had been excluded from these thresholds and passages, from these bridges and tunnels, and from these corridors which had been created for others. (Ondaatje 2017, 18)

This passage illustrates the ways in which the physical space of the city reflects the exclusion and marginalization of immigrant and working-class communities. They are excluded from the very spaces that define the city, and must find their own ways of navigating the urban landscape.

As a newcomer to the city, Patrick is excluded from mainstream society and forced to live in the margins of Toronto. Ondaatje highlights the marginalization of immigrants through the character of Nicholas Temelcoff, a Macedonian labourer who works on the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct. Nicholas is seen as a threat to the dominant order and is subjected to violence and exclusion:

> He was Macedonian, that was enough to make him an enemy of the Austrians, and he was working on the Viaduct where several Italian masons had been imported to build it. [...] the Italians beat him up during their lunch hour when they caught him eating a sandwich with garlic in it, and told him not to come back to the construction site again. (Ondaatje 2017, 28)

Nicholas is excluded from the construction site because of his ethnic identity and his refusal to conform to the dominant culture. The violence he experiences is a result of his position as an outsider, and highlights the ways in which marginalized groups are subjected to physical and psychological violence in order to maintain dominant power structures. Through the character of Nicholas, Ondaatje critiques the idea of a unified Canadian identity and highlights the exclusion of ethnic and racial minorities from the mainstream.

In addition to exploring the exclusion of ethnic and racial minorities, *In the Skin of a Lion* also examines the exclusion of women from public life. The novel features the character of Clara Dickens, a photographer who is excluded from the male-dominated world of photography. Ondaatje depicts Clara as a woman who can resist her exclusion and assert her agency within a patriarchal system: "She had learned that men could be tricked into doing almost anything if they were first convinced that women couldn't do it. So that was what she had done with photography - tricked them" (Ondaatje 2017, 66).

Clara's ability to trick men into believing that women are unable to do certain tasks is a form of resistance against the patriarchal structures that excluded her from the profession. By asserting her agency and challenging the dominant narrative of female incompetence, Clara is able to carve out a space for herself in a male-dominated world. Ondaatje uses Clara's character to illustrate the ways in which marginalized individuals can resist their exclusion and assert their agency within oppressive systems.

Aside from its exploration of exclusion and marginalization in Canadian society, *In the Skin of a Lion* also engages with issues of identity and representation. Through the character of Patrick Lewis, the novel explores the challenges of defining oneself in the face

of cultural and social pressures. As an immigrant and labourer, Patrick is constantly struggling to assert his identity and find a place in Canadian society.

One of the key ways in which Patrick attempts to define himself is through his relationship with Alice Gull, a wealthy socialite who is involved in the construction of the Bloor Street Viaduct. Alice represents a different world from Patrick's, and their relationship is fraught with tensions and misunderstandings. However, Alice also provides Patrick with a sense of validation and a glimpse into a different way of life. Ondaatje writes: "She had shown him things he had never known existed, shared a life with him that had not been his. In a city full of all kinds of people, they had stood together, separate and alien, but together" (Ondaatje 2017, 121).

This passage highlights the ways in which relationships can provide validation and a sense of identity in the face of exclusion and marginalization. Despite their differences, Alice and Patrick find a sense of belonging with each other, even as they remain separate from the larger society around them.

Another key way in which Patrick attempts to assert his identity is through his involvement in labour activism. Patrick becomes involved with a group of anarchists who are advocating for workers' rights and the overthrow of the capitalist system. Through his involvement

with this group, Patrick is able to find a sense of purpose and meaning in his work, even as he remains excluded from the larger society. Ondaatje writes: "The anarchists had given him a way of looking at the city, and the workers' struggles had given him a way of participating in it" (Ondaatje 2017, 190).

This passage highlights the ways in which political activism can provide a sense of purpose and belonging for marginalized communities. By working towards a shared goal, Patrick and the other labour activists can define themselves in opposition to the dominant culture and assert their own identities.

Another key theme in the novel is the role of language in the process of exclusion and marginalization. The dominant language of Canadian society is English, and those who do not speak it are often excluded and marginalized. Ondaatje writes: "English was the key to the world, the only language worth knowing. All the other tongues were forgotten and the people who spoke them disappeared into silence, lost their stories, their songs, their histories, their voices" (Ondaatje 2017, 32).

This passage highlights the ways in which language is used as a tool of power and exclusion. Those who do not speak the dominant language are denied access to the larger culture and are silenced, losing their voices and their histories in the process.

In the Skin of a Lion can be read as a postcolonial novel that explores issues of exclusion and marginalization in Canadian society. Through the character of Patrick Lewis and the experiences of immigrant and working-class communities, the novel highlights the ways in which the physical space of the city and the dominant language of society are used to exclude and marginalize those who do not fit within the dominant culture. Ondaatje's exploration of these themes provides important insights into the challenges faced by marginalized communities in the postcolonial context.

Conclusion

Michael Ondaatje's works are marked by a powerful exploration of the politics of exclusion and marginalization. Through his portrayal of marginalized characters, Ondaatje challenges readers to consider the ways in which their own identities are shaped by larger social and historical forces. Using postcolonial theory as a framework for analysis, this essay has explored the ways in which Ondaatje's works engage with broader questions of power, identity, and resistance.

In particular, this paper has examined two of Ondaatje's most acclaimed novels, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, and demonstrated the ways in which they offer important insights into the experiences of margin-

alized communities in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism. Through his portrayal of the lives of immigrant labourers in In the Skin of a Lion and the intersection of colonialism and war in The English Patient, Ondaatje highlights the impact of systemic exclusion and marginalization on individuals and communities.

Ondaatje's writing goes beyond simply representing the experiences of marginalized communities. Instead, he uses his writing to engage with broader questions of power, identity, and resistance. Through his exploration of themes such as memory, history, and storytelling, Ondaatje offers a nuanced and complex understanding of the ways in which individuals and communities can resist marginalization and reclaim their identities.

Ondaatje's powerful and thought-provoking writing, speaks to broader questions of power and identity in the postcolonial world. By examining the politics of exclusion and marginalization in Ondaatje's works, this paper attempts at contributing to our understanding of the complexities of identity in the postcolonial world, and the ways in which individuals and communities can resist systemic exclusion and marginalization.

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The Violence of Silence: Examining Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*

Anisa Fathima

At the epicentre of every war lies the devastation wrought by violence in its most brutal form. Violence, according to Arendt (1970), is instrumental by nature and appears in its pure state in times of war, when it is instrumentalised to its optimum capacity and only seeks to destroy. Delving deeper, beyond the visible spectacle involving perpetrators and combatants, what can be excavated are the many layers of violence that are rendered invisible by the deafening noise of war. The scale of violence caused is not limited to the belligerents: it percolates the everyday life of individuals living in its midst as well as in its periphery. Entrenched within this space of the everyday is a persistent silence that is either imposed by violence or co-opted as a marker of resistance. Con-

ventional studies explore the phenomenon of violence through the lens of direct or indirect effects of systems of power and power relations, where language (such as interviews with victims) and statistical data play a key role in determining the impact of violence. An examination of violence from the perspective of silence, while unravelling the effects of power, additionally entails looking for gaps and crevices where language and data may be lacking or altogether absent. This requires a shift in the focus from what is said to what is unsaid or inadequately expressed, from what is visible to what lies beneath the surface, and an investigation into the factors that impose or mask these silences. It entails listening closely and paying attention to "silent subtexts, to what is being left out, not said, or intentionally repressed" (Mazzei 2007, 9). Academic studies on silence range from analyses of its function as a mode of communication to its role in the oppression of marginalised communities. Adam Jaworski (1997) for instance treats silence as a "*metaphor for communication*" (3, emphasis in original) that allows for a descriptive analysis of silence in different contexts, from a pause in a conversation to aesthetic silence depicted in works of art. Robin Patric Clair (1998) examines the concept of silence from a feminist perspective, arguing that the power to silence is embedded within the notion of privilege, and that there exists an institutional silence when it comes to violence against women and other marginalised groups. Drawing from Foucault, Aidan Russell (2019) speaks of the "regimes of silence" that

characterise political states and social structures. An examination of "how pressures and structures constitute a political regime of constraint, or arise from social expectations, sensitivities, conventions or divisions" (Russell 2019, 7) allows one to unravel the threads that connect silence and systems of power, whether it is the powerful who impose silence, or the powerless who "refrain from speaking" (Russell 2019, 7).

Silence thus indicates the inherent presence of violence in its passive, systemic, or physical form. A point of consensus that runs through various academic explorations into silence is that it is not just an absence of speech or a failure of language: silence, in Max Picard's (1988) words, is an "autonomous phenomenon" and "therefore not identical with the suspension of language." It is "an independent whole" and is as creative as language (Picard 1988, 15). With a focus on Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, this paper aims to explore the concept of violence and its relation to silence in the context of the US-led invasion into Afghanistan following the 9/11 terror attacks. The novel juxtaposes the troubled yet silent lives of ordinary individuals against the cacophony of the US military's War on Terror on the one hand and the dissonant, open resistance of Islamist forces on the other. Living on the edges of war and simultaneously in its midst, the characters experience silence in myriad, often interconnected yet distinct ways: as a consequence of or response to American hegemony, patriarchal he-

gemony, religious oppression, as well as conscientious silence rooted in a refusal or an inability to express.

Aslam's novel is set in late 2001 and early 2002, when the US-led forces invaded Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 terror attacks on American soil. The story revolves around the lives of Rohan, an elderly visually-impaired man, his daughter-in-law Naheed who loses her husband Jeo in the war, Jeo's foster brother and Naheed's lover Mikal who is wrongly arrested and tortured by the US military, Naheed's mother Tara, Mikal's brother Basie and his wife Yasmin. The family lives in the fictional town of Heer straddling the porous, volatile border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The novel deals with several issues that plague Afghanistan and the border region: the takeover of secular schools and public spaces by radical Islamists, the torture inflicted on civilians by the invading Western forces, the geopolitics of war, the instrumentalisation of religion for political goals, and the myriad ways in which war affects ordinary lives. It also explores issues involving moral dilemma, particularly, the violent consequences of well-intentioned or seemingly innocent human actions, the urge to break social and religious boundaries in favour of individual freedom, and the silent suffering as well as resistance by women chained by those boundaries.

There is a persistent silence pervading the novel, manifesting in each character's life as well as in the narrative

in different ways. Aslam employs silence as a metaphor by means of extensive use of imageries: a woman with an "ancient" face and "calm but not passive" eyes who visits Rohan's garden a couple of times a year to examine every fallen leaf in search for god (Aslam 2014, 27), the bird pardoner who acts as a catalyst for people's path to redemption, and a heavily shackled mendicant, whose chains embody the wishes and needs of those who harbour hopes against all odds. The mendicant adds a link to his chains each time an individual has a need, and wanders the land praying until the link vanishes "miraculously" in fulfilment of the need (Aslam 2014, 65). The bird pardoner ensnares birds and releases them when paid by one who wants his sins pardoned, because it is believed that the "freed bird says a prayer on behalf of the one who has bought its freedom. And God never ignores the prayers of the weak" (Aslam 2014, 7). The three imageries point at the inherent presence of violence: in a land impacted by endless war, the ordinary civilians who have been silenced and neglected by political, social, and economic systems search for ways to alleviate their sufferings and find solace in the divine through the mendicant's prayers or the promise of the birds' prayers. The silent woman looks through the fallen leaves in search of god, in hopes that god has not forsaken the land and its people. The chains, the bird cages and the fallen leaves are all silent by virtue of their inanimate states, yet they amplify voices that have suffered endless violence.

Rohan's blindness in itself is a condition that silences his visual experience of the world. The blindness is imposed upon him partly by old age and accelerated by an act of violence by a warlord's men who force shards of ruby stone into his eyes. The sensory loss compels him to depend on his other senses, primarily his sense of touch, to understand the world anew. He begins to associate the memories in his mind's eye to his tactile experiences, such as the touch of a warm surface with the colour red, or the twinkling stars with droplets of rain. The omnipotent narrator of the novel notes that Rohan's blindness "almost coincided with the death of the two boys [Jeo and Mikal]" (Aslam 2014, 206), symbolising not just a physical loss but something much deeper, the loss of a support system. Rohan's blindness leaves the family vulnerable to exploitation of the powerful who are looking to usurp his house or marry Naheed. Their neighbour Sharif offers to pay for Rohan's surgery in return for Naheed's hand in marriage. The family resists the offer, but the loss of the male members of the family, Jeo, Basie and Mikal, makes it increasingly difficult for Naheed and Tara to live in a patriarchal system dominated by the likes of Sharif and Major Kyra, the former Pakistani ISI agent who is eyeing Rohan's house. While there is no direct violence involved, Sharif's lascivious advances and Kyra's threatening figure inflict a form of passive violence on the family such that Naheed, Tara and Rohan are forced to contemplate submission.

In addition to the violence inflicted by external factors, Rohan constantly suffers from an internal torture in the form of guilt over his past actions, particularly the way he treated his apostate wife Sofia in her dying moments. Though he never speaks of it, the reader is privy to his silent ruminations that reveal his conflicted existence in relation to his religiosity. Ridden with fear that Sofia would be damned for eternity, Rohan had tried "desperately" to make her repent by withholding her medicine. Sofia had wilfully rejected Islam in what was a "gradual" process and died an apostate despite Rohan's efforts to change her beliefs. After her death, Rohan resorted to constant prayers and journeys in search of "anything that might absolve her of her sins" (Aslam 2004, 42), to the extent that he neglected his children. However, his insistence on saving her soul does not constitute prolonged denial: his gradual realization that he had forced his religion on her, in contravention of the Islamic decree against compulsion (El Fadl 2007, 159), evokes in him a sense of guilt at his own cruelty. His silence or inability to express his guilt emerges from a site of self-loathing and shame, but also a deep, perpetual mourning for Sofia. To borrow from Jay Winter (2010) Rohan's memory of his actions towards Sofia constitutes a "hidden deposit" that is "concealed at some moments and revealed at others." It is a "liturgical silence" that encompasses the whole realm of "loss, mourning, sacrifice and redemption," and allows the mourner to grieve in their own time (Winter 2010, 4).

Aslam juxtaposes the silencing power of death with the violence wrought upon the body that dies: not only is there a graphic description of Jeo's violent death, it is accompanied by a deafening silence that obliterates his ability to scream but makes him aware of the grating sound of the spear against the inside of his skull. After Jeo's body arrives, Naheed, breaking convention, locks herself up with Jeo's violence-ridden corpse and slowly examines each wound. The body, silenced by death, finds its voice in the vivid and graphic description of the violence it suffered. The reader is not privy to Naheed's thoughts as she runs her fingers through the wounds, and in this sense, there is a stoic silence on her part. Judith Butler (2004) argues that in mourning there is a "transformative effect of loss" when "something about who we are is revealed... that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us" (21-22). Jeo's death has a transformative effect on Naheed in multiple ways: it bestows on her the status of a widow, therefore hurtling her into a social condition that comes with its prejudices and pressures silencing her more than ever, but at the same time it is emancipatory as it liberates her from the binds of marriage and rekindles the possibility of reuniting with Mikal. Moreover, she refuses to follow the norms of normative behaviour expected of a new widow by locking herself up and spending time alone with her dead husband's body. Aslam here juxtaposes Naheed's stoic silence with the noise of women knocking on her door, reinforcing

the boundary between individual desire and societal demands. Her silence has a transcendental quality and acts as a form of resistance against the social norm of performative display of sorrow.

It is in the inner recesses of the house that silence becomes "concealed and revealed" (Winter 2010) as Tara and Naheed engage in private conversations that often escalate into arguments. Tara and Naheed share a complex mother-daughter relationship, at times tender but often conflicted. Tara has had a difficult past where as a new widow she suffered physical violence at the hands of men and then systemic violence when she was falsely incarcerated for adultery, while Naheed has lived a fairly protected life albeit without exercising agency. There is a generational shift in the way the two women perceive their situation: while Tara's personal experience of violence as a new widow and persistent trauma induce in her a fear that Naheed too would become a "plaything" for men (Aslam 2014, 104), Naheed views herself as an independent woman whose time has come to reclaim her life. We later see Naheed breaking social and cultural boundaries by fulfilling her wish to unite with Mikal, albeit secretly. Reticent by nature, she silently and sometimes aloud resists the pressures of patriarchal power. She fights back Sharif's advances, leaves her home in a solitary search for Mikal, dares to have Mikal's baby out of wedlock, and pursues her dream of becoming a teacher. In contrast, the patriarchal environment around

Tara and her own experiences have conditioned her to view women's existence as being solely dependent on men, and the fact that Naheed is carrying Jeo's child worries Tara for she believes it would ruin her prospects to remarry. What Tara attempts to do here is impose an essentialist silence where the "right to speak" is a privilege claimed by some by virtue of their experience (Winter 2010). Therefore, silencing Naheed and permanently silencing her unborn child by an act of violence is entrenched in Tara's own sufferings as a widow with a young child. Naheed suspects Tara of trying to kill her foetus, but eventually she herself opts for abortion. In doing so, Naheed reclaims her body and agency, cuts off the remnant of her life with Jeo, and frees Tara from the guilt of wanting to commit foeticide. The inner recess of the house serves as a safe space for the two women to speak their minds, their conversations rarely crossing its threshold. It is here that Naheed breaks her silence on her love for Mikal and confronts her mother for betraying her. It is here that Tara accuses her daughter of being selfish and potentially exposing her to public ridicule by conspiring to elope with Mikal. It is here that the two women stand in "pained silence" (Aslam 2014, 107) over hurting each other, their repressed anger and frustration finding expression but not resolved by the truth of their confessions.

The complex intertwining of silence and violence is even more apparent in the journey that Mikal embarks

on, first as a volunteer to help Afghans injured in the battlefield, then as a prisoner of the Taliban and the Americans, and finally as a fugitive wanted for the double murder of American soldiers. He becomes a victim of circumstances almost in a Kafaesque sense, getting thrown into situations beyond his control or understanding, and reduced to a silent spectator to the events of his own life. His well-intentioned journey to join the battlefield turns nightmarish when he and Jeo are secretly sold to the Taliban on Major Kyra's orders. The Americans along with villagers attack the Taliban fort and both Jeo are Mikal are mistakenly assumed to be Talibs. While the furious villagers kill Jeo, Mikal becomes an object of barter for different warlords, until he finally escapes but is captured by the Americans in a raid. Violence becomes an instrument to silence all possibility of resistance or retaliation when a warlord chops off Mikal's index fingers to prevent him from triggering a gun. But it is in American custody that the full scale of the silencing power of violence comes to fore. The Americans, suspecting Mikal to be a member of the Al Qaeda, subject him to relentless torture, dehumanising him in the process. Mikal and other prisoners are kept in cages like trapped animals, fully stripped of their agency and identity. Aslam describes at length the torture techniques used by the US military, throwing the spotlight on the larger issue of American hegemony and imperialism that instrumentalises violence to silence entire populations. The war on terror was waged on the logic that "there are

no innocent people in a guilty nation," (Aslam 2014, 6) therefore incriminating entire populations in the 9/11 attacks. Sarah O'Brien (2021) notes that "Aslam's blunt phrasing in referring to 'guilty nations' speaks to the truth of what happened following 9/11 as innocence was disallowed conceptually in countries - Afghanistan and Iraq - where the full horror of war became a reality" (98). In giving space and voice to the prisoners, Aslam humanises the marginalised victims of Western neocolonialism who are otherwise silenced in the dominant narrative of war. Inside the torture cells where all prisoners are presumed "guilty" merely on the basis of their identity, violence is used by the military to break their silence, to force them into confessions that may or may not be true but would nevertheless serve the imperial goal of hunting down the "guilty". The response to such violence elicited in the prisoner is thus one that only seeks to end the pain of bodily torture. Mikal is bombarded with questions and subjected to mind games and psychological torture to provoke such a response. The words spoken by the white man are alien to Mikal, their sounds arranged into signs by an interpreter. To Mikal, it seems as if a "disembodied voice in the air" is making the sounds (Aslam 2014, 181).

There is a clear cultural disconnect here between the speaker and the interpreter and the receiver, the only response from the latter being a steadfast silence emerging from both incomprehension as well as a refusal to

connect. In creating such language barriers, O'Brien (2021) notes, Aslam alienates the Western reader and constructs the white man's language as that of a "strange and threatening Other" (103). While the Americans perceive Mikal's silence as an indication of his training as a terrorist, it is in fact rooted in Mikal's fear for the safety of Rohan's family. The silence employed by Mikal is both a refusal to speak as well as a verbal resistance to giving his abusers what they demand. There is a power play at work here: the more Mikal pushes back through silence, the more violent and louder the military policemen become. Arendt (1970) argues that power and violence are opposites: violence comes into play when power is in jeopardy, and this is what the frustration of the Americans makes evident. When physical violence fails to break him, the Americans resort to humiliate him: while he is shackled, a white man enters the cell and mocks him and his country with a grotesque laughter, shaming him for belonging to a "disgusting repulsive" country full of violence and corruption. The white man, like a "malevolent god," deliberately indulges in a racist diatribe while laughing uncontrollably, his "eyes full of hatred and accusation and hilarity and mirth at this citizen of a shameless beggar country full of liars, hypocrites, beaters of women and children...." (Aslam 2014, 191). The white man's rant is non-stop, without a period. Aslam employs this narrative strategy to not only lay bare the Oriental narrative lying at the root of the American exceptionalism, invasion and its civilising mission,

but also as a lament for the depths Aslam's homeland has plunged into. Mikal's only response to the mocking laughter is to whisper "what about you," coaxing him to admit the West's role in ruining his country. The laughter fills the room "roaring like a giant" and suddenly stops, plunging the cell into darkness and silence. This silence is so sharp that it fills Mikal with a pain he has not felt before: the psychological humiliation manifests itself in physical pain that is "screaming at him in a real voice, using human words" (Aslam 2014, 192). While the grotesqueness of the laugh and the white man's words humiliate as well as goad Mikal into a counter argument, it is the silence that brings home the agony inflicted by the man's psychological violence.

Despite the dizziness induced by sleep-depriving torture, Mikal counters the military men's questions with some of his own and calls their bluff, for instance, when the Americans tell him that Jeo was in their custody and had confessed to being a terror operative, Mikal responds to all follow-up questions with "Ask Jeo" (Aslam 2014, 186). At one point, the Americans trick Mikal into believing that Jeo is being tortured in the next room by making him hear screams of agony. There is a juxtaposition of noise and Mikal's silence, and though Mikal tells himself not to believe the Americans, the screaming becomes intolerable and eventually provokes Mikal into lunging at his interrogator, and then when he hears him say Naheed's name, it awakens the "animal part" in

him (Aslam 2014, 193). Arendt (1970) argues that rage and violence are "'natural' *human* emotions," and under conditions of torture, their absence becomes the "the clearest sign of dehumanization," (63, 64, emphasis in original). The violence inflicted by the Americans fails to dehumanise Mikal completely, for not only does he fight back, but even when he falsely claims to have connections with Bin Laden to make the screaming noise stop, he still withholds information about his identity. His false confession is also a kind of silence where words are used to mask the truth.

The torture he suffers in American custody nevertheless creates a deep suspicion in his mind: the endless lies he has been told to break his silence have blurred the distinction between truth and falsehood. Mikal's life was constantly under threat in US custody, the physical violence being part of the process to decimate him. He is unable to trust the Americans anymore, and when he is finally freed and dropped off, he believes that they intend to execute him. When his back is turned, he senses a "whiff of sulphur that is the unmistakable clue that a bullet has been fired" (Aslam 2014, 218), and the extreme fear for his life creates a momentary lapse in his mind propelling him to commit violence against the US soldiers, whom he shoots dead with their own gun. The gunshot (fired by someone from the mosque at the Americans) signifies violence, and Mikal's immediate response is to defend himself by inflicting violence on the

enemy. It may also be conjectured that Mikal, having suffered extreme torture, harbours a subconscious yearning to exact revenge, and the whiff of the bullet is enough to trigger his instincts. At a later period, he dreams that Jeo or Basie "asks him if he is certain that he hadn't wanted to shoot the two Americans by the lake – wondering if he had killed them intentionally" (Aslam 2014, 270). Violence thus transforms an innocent man into a murderer. It is at this moment that Mikal becomes a fugitive: to the Americans he is a deadly terrorist, to the civilians he meets he is either a hero who killed the enemy or a battle-hardened militant. Mikal however is seemingly filled with guilt over his vulnerability in the moment. There is an overbearing narrative silence regarding Mikal's thoughts on his action – there is neither an internal monologue nor an explanation by the omnipotent narrator - but the reader does get a glimpse into his mind in bits of conversations and passing remarks. At the gun factory operated by his rescuer Akbar, for instance, we are told that Mikal has no desire to ever touch a gun again, yet he is compelled by circumstances to work with weapons. He confesses to Naheed too, expressing regret over his action. His chance at redemption presents itself when he comes across an injured American soldier during an errand. Once more, the reader is not privy to his thoughts on the soldier or his motive behind rescuing him: one is left to guess that Mikal plans to use him as a leverage to strike a deal with the Americans in exchange for pardon, or at a more personal level, redeem himself

by saving an American's life. In an inversion of power relation, now it is the American who fears for his life and is rendered silent, while Mikal is in charge. Unlike the Americans however, Mikal does not inflict violence on him, instead he shields him from the other people's wrath and rescues him from the custody of a warlord. He shelters the American inside a mosque and uses Naheed's necklace to reconnect a broken microphone in order to summon the American forces to rescue them: the minaret that was silent is now employed for "summoning unbelievers, to arrive and desecrate His house" (Aslam 2014, 405). To the people gathering outside, this is an ultimate act of treason, of blasphemy. Yet, for Mikal, his redemption can only come if he can save a life to atone for the two he has taken. While the American soldier is rescued by the US special forces, they leave Mikal behind. Mikal's final redemptive act is his sacrifice as he falls into eternal silence amid the chaos and confusion of violence.

A central theme that Aslam explores in the novel is that of Islamist radicalisation in the backdrop of prolonged wars in the region. In a subversion of the dominant narrative prevalent in most 9/11 literature and discourse that portrays Islam as being inherently violent and which demonises Muslims, Aslam in his previous novel *The Wasted Vigil* has traced the historical, social and political conditions that gave rise to violent puritanism, particularly turning attention to Western interference in the

region, but also probing the Muslim community's own failure in addressing the issue. In *The Blind Man's Garden*, he takes this endeavour further, examining the impact of such developments on the life of marginalised communities (O'Brien 2021). In this sense, Aslam breaks the silence on the roles played by transnational powers in the decline of Afghanistan and the peripheral regions. Rohan's school Ardent Spirit, established to impart Islamic as well as worldly education to children, is taken over by extremists with connections to Pakistan's ISI and soon becomes a hub for training young men for jihad. Aslam here explores the gradual corrosion and eventual obliteration of secular education by the more vocal puritanical forces. In *The Wasted Vigil*, Aslam traces this corrosion to the days of the Cold War, when the CIA had covertly distributed jihadist literature in the refugee camps bordering Pakistan and some regions of the USSR. Rohan is deeply disturbed by the radicalisation of his school, reflected in the way the school's name board has undergone a transformation from "*Education is the basis of law and order*" to "*Islamic*" education and finally to "I*slam is the purpose of life and death*" (Aslam 2014, 30-31, emphasis in original). Moreover, Rohan designed the school as an ode to the early Islamic civilization when cities like Baghdad, Mecca, Cairo, Delhi and others blossomed as centres of learning and scientific pursuits. The buildings in the school campus represent each of these centres of learning, but now they lie dormant, reduced to little more than silent reminders of the past.

The transformation signifies the silencing of scientific temper with the rise of religious extremism not only in Afghanistan but the world over. Rohan is branded a traitor to his religion for protesting this transformation and is totally shut out and silenced. The school now belongs to Major Kyra, who plans to mould the children into "warrior saints, brilliant in deceit against the West and its sympathisers here at home" (Aslam 2014, 31). There is also a corresponding restriction on women, limiting their access to public spaces and asserting male control over their bodies. When Rohan, Naheed, Yasmin and Tara pay a visit to Jeo's grave, they are stopped by four women in full-bodied burkhas, wearing "green bands with the flaming-swords motif of Ardent Spirit's flag" and brandishing canes. The women claim that Muslim women are prohibited from visiting the graveyard, calling the practice an "innovation" (Aslam 2014, 92). The women shame Naheed for showing her face, insult Rohan with cuss words and yet claim to speak on god's behalf, privileging themselves as "superior" in god's eyes (Aslam 2014, 94). Rohan and his family acquiesce even though they could have challenged the women with a debate on religion. Their silence may be read as representing the silence of the majority of moderate Muslims against the amplification of radical voices. The silencing power of the zealous women can be analysed in terms of the privilege they exercise within the marginalised group to which they belong, namely that encompassing Muslim women. Robin Patric Clair (1998) exam-

ines coercive practices of domination in marginalised communities in terms of privilege that occur between groups, within groups and the privileging of practices or structures. Clair defines within group privileging as the practicing of those acts that are "primarily confined to one group as described according to one subject position" (57). The radicalised women who stop Naheed and other women claim privilege by virtue of their subject position as self-appointed guardians of god's will. They are however themselves marginalised and subjected to symbolic and ideological violence by a patriarchy that silences their agency, limits their political and social access, and asserts ownership of their bodies. But within the domain encompassing Muslim women, this form of patriarchy rewards the obedient women with status and privilege, enshrining it within the discourse of a specific version of Islam. The obedient women are thus empowered to claim privilege over other women in their marginalised group, and silence them by exercising the right to inflict violence that they have been bestowed in the name of religion.

Major Kyra along with a handful of his radicalised students plan a hostage attack on a school run by Christian missionaries, where Basie and his wife Yasmin teach. The attack, though it may seem religiously motivated, is at its core political, aimed at sending a message to the Americans and to their own government. The jihad that they embark on is thus a response to the violence of

the Western invasion. Throughout the novel the reader comes across ordinary civilians readily sending their sons to the battlefield to defend their land and religion, and at one point, Rohan himself silently expresses this wish. The young men planning the school attack take on the political role of reviving their religion as the basis of law and order, and instilling patriotism in fellow Muslims. They are aware of the scant respect and attention they command within the larger community, and hence the school attack also serves as a means to get noticed. Convinced of their reasoning, they are faced with the "enormity of their struggle" against the forces that aim to eliminate them (Aslam 2014, 177). Acts of spectacular violence, such as bombing a Christian school are thus dismissed because "neither... [the] government nor anyone in the West will care about it" (Aslam 2014, 172). They decide on targeting children, one of the most vulnerable and agency-less groups among humankind, so as to instil mass fear in such a way that civilians themselves would demand the government to take notice. Their main target, apart from the absent priest Fr Mede, is Basie. The teachers and students victimised during the raid conceal Basie's identity even though he is present, thus shielding him from violence. In this shared space of victimhood, there is a shared silence as well. It is only in an act of violence, directed at Naheed, that this silence is broken as she calls out to Basie in desperation. The breaking of silence over his identity puts him in danger and he is mercilessly killed. Thus, in this moment

of crisis, violence is kept at bay by silence, but the moment the silence is broken, it paves the way for violence. Conversely, it is violence that imposes silence in the first place. Silence and violence are thus not only embedded in each other, they appear in reciprocity.

While there is an overbearing presence of fundamentalist as well as Western voices in the dominant discourses on 9/11, what Aslam endeavours in *The Blind Man's Garden* is to vocalise the marginalised communities and the voice of the moderate Muslims who, despite their majority, are either unheard or silent by choice or compulsion. In addition, there is no Western protagonist, the West being solely represented as a brutal force (O'Brien 2021). This is again a subversion of the dominant voice that has characterised post-9/11 literature. As O'Brien (2021) notes, the novel "gives narrative space to the stories of those people in 'guilty nations' whose innocence has been denied and indeed stolen by the violence inflicted in support of Western, and more specifically American, hegemony since 9/11" (98-99). An incident that reveals this hitherto silent voice in its full force is when villagers attack Ahmed the Moth, Major Kyra's brother who had radicalised Ardent Spirit, their rage bursting forth violently:

> A group of ordinary citizens had grabbed hold of him and a Taliban soldier on the street corner and forced them to the ground. Every ounce of rage—

> every rape, every disappearance, every public execution, every hand amputated during the past seven years of the Taliban regime, every twelve-year-old boy pressed into battle by them, every ten-year-old girl forcibly married to a mullah eight times her age, every man lashed, every woman beaten, every limb broken—was poured into the two men by fist, club, stick, foot and stone, and when they finished and dispersed nothing remained of the pair. It was as if they had been eaten (Aslam 2014, 47).

Similarly, civilians including women charge at the Taliban when the American forces raid the fort where Jeo and Mikal are held captive. Their violent response is a result of prolonged oppression that silenced them into submission. It is a manifestation of a visceral desire to not only reclaim their freedom and agency but to punish their oppressors. However, they are still bereft of agency as they need the assistance and encouragement of the American forces to rise up against the Taliban, and therefore are little more than "pawn[s]" to serve American interests in demolishing the militant group (O'Brien 2021, 109).

Silence and violence thus percolate the narrative space of Aslam's novel in myriad ways: not only in the intensely visible violence of the war, the silencing and eventual resistance of the population at the centre of the conflict, but in the invisible, inaudible voices that reside in the inner recesses of marginalised towns on the periphery.

Though the war in Afghanistan is central to the novel's plot, Afghan characters are conspicuously absent. O'Brien (2021) argues that their absence from the narrative in fact "foregrounds, rather than obscures, their marginalisation on the world stage," reflecting the way Afghanistan has been viewed as little more than "collateral damage" in America's quest for dominance (103). In a way, Aslam amplifies their silence and in the process, calls attention to the violence they have suffered at the hands of transnational powers, the Islamist forces and at the individual level as members of the marginalised communities in which they live.

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Socio-Political Activism and Nationhood in the Poetry of Odia Ofeimun

Peter E. Omoko

> …that poetry works! above the ruse of power
> hate decrees and hundred and twenty eight
> ways to homicide fashioned by mongrels
> who tie pythons round the waist of the Delta
> to defeat hope and suffocate dreams…
>
> (Go Tell the Generals,101)

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to examine the salient metaphors of activism in Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* and *Go tell the Generals* and interrogate the social and political issues in the poems that are aimed at redirecting the Nigerian tide towards the path of progress. It attempts the analysis of the diverse sites of poetic truths spoken to powers, as

well as the decapitations of the indices of nationhood in the two collections. The examination of Ofeimun's poetry in this essay covers the basic ideas, thematic goals, as well as the formal elements of his poetry that endear them to the masses. What is discernible in the two collections is a nation stripped naked of all its dregs of humanity by her political leaders.

Poetry is one of the major literary channels through which the writer communicates with his audience. This is because poetry communicates ideas through the medium of metaphors and images that imbue in the human psyche, the social reality of the time. Poetry, often times, is influenced by various factors; social, economic, historical, cultural and political. The writer, being a member of the society, weaves these experiences into his poetry so that his audience can have a feel of his inner thoughts concerning such social and public affairs. This is why Ngara believes that the "impact poets make depends on the significance of what they say about social reality and on how effectively they communicate their vision to their readers" (1990, xi). The Nigerian writers, like those elsewhere, have in their creative works, reacted to the social and political dysfunctions that constitute the lots of the people in the society. They serve as the mouth piece of the people by reflecting and refracting events that have bearing in the life of the people. Mao expresses this idea when he avers that, "works of literature and art are products of reflection in the human brain of the life

of a given society" (1975, 81). According to him, "the life of the people is always a mine of the raw materials in their natural form, they provide literature and art an inexhaustible source" (Mao 1975, 81). Awhefeada corroborates the above statement when he explains that the "writer should be seen as actively involved in the unfolding experience of his society not only as a recorder, but also as a participant trying to shape events" (2006, 374).

Thus, the committed writer stands as the mediating force in the society on whose shoulder other aspects of the superstructure of the social-divide (the authorities standing at the apex and the populace at the summit) are well equilibrated. Since he does not possess the material power to change his society to the exotic utopia that he wants, nevertheless, he reflects such necessary residues in the society that makes for constant positive progress. With this consciousness, we can boldly say that the poet, through his works is a potential catalyst for positive change in a society that is 'alive' to its responsibility. I use the word 'alive' to mean such a society that is not altogether lost in the greed of self-destruction as Nigeria. Onoge reminds us that, "literary ideas like other ideas 'do not fall from heaven, nor do we receive them as a gift of God while we sleep'. On the contrary, ideas are the products of social practice, usually reflecting the struggles to resolve the internal contradictions of a society" (1978, 94).

Odia Ofeimun and the Post-Civil War Nigerian Writers

The post-civil war Nigerian writers are more radical in their quest for socio-political change than their predecessors. They are rooted among the masses who have been dispossessed by the political class and have used their works to redirect the masses to confront their oppressors headlong. Obafemi foregrounds the dichotomy between the post-civil war Nigerian writers and their predecessors when he notes that the thematic aesthetics of the post-civil war writers are "materialist in description and perception and dialectical in approach," unlike the older writers whose works tend to follow "quite uncritically classical specifications" as well as being "existentialist in their search for formal excellence, sometimes even to the detriment of content" (1988, 57). According to him, these writers believe that man's "problems originate from man and not from the metaphysical realm or from the gods" (Obafemi 1988, 57). He further foregrounds this point when he tells us that,

> while their predecessors deal with universal verities and metaphysical profundities such as the part psychic search for the meaning of life and death in Soyinka's The Road, the young playwrights deal with urgent contemporary social problems in Nigeria… (quoted in Umukoro,12).

Similar view is also expressed by Ojaide he tells us that Odia Ofeimun "belongs to the generation of Nigerian/

African poets/writers who believe in the transformative role of the literary art and deploying it as a weapon towards regaining the lost ideals of nationhood; in Nigeria's case, the vision of a model independent African state" (1996, 13). According to him, the "art this generation advocates is utilitarian and meant to advance the goals of humanity, especially in the areas of good governance, equality, justice, and human development" (Ojaide 1996, 13). In other words, the writer deploys his artistic skills to the services of the society from whatever perspective he deems appropriate to his purpose. Thus, in the deployment of images and metaphors in many of his poetry, Ofeimun, like other African committed writers confront issues that have bearing on the people. This is because he imbues in his works, images and metaphor that deny the enemy of the masses sleep. Ofeimun's poetry is one that pitted the state against the downtrodden who looked to them for direction. Ojaide, a contemporary of Ofeimun gives us insights into the social-political environment of their time that necessitated the revolutionary nature of the poetry of his generation. He tells us that:

> I believe in the artist's activist role. Action counts to remedy a bad situation. Being passive or apolitical will not change things. Patience may be a virtue in good times, but not in the desperate era in which Africans are living. Conditions unique to the Africa of my day have made me believe strongly that bad conditions do not change unless there is persistent effort to reverse the current of evil. To accept the

> corruption as endemic and so insurmountable is to accept defeat. To accept the military's trampling of justice and freedom without protest or resistance is to accept a cursed life and to shirk one's responsibility. Not to act means hopelessness. I have hope. We are hopeful. However indirect we may have to be in our struggle, we are contributing to a dismantling of oppression and corruption. I have used the image of the struggle which collectively will destroy the oppressors. (2012, 125)

Odia Ofeimun has over the years distinguished himself as one of the most significant post-civil war Nigerian writers, who have used his art profusely to engage the sundry socio-political misfortune of his people. He imbues in his works poetic vignettes that send shivers through the spines of all those who have held the nation on her toes and at the same time, mourns the docility of the Nigerian populace whose silence captures the vagaries of the nation's historical trajectory. Ofeimun thus stands as a social crusader who sides with the debased Nigerian masses. His poetry is replete with images of exploitation, oppression, poverty, and subjugation of the Nigerian downtrodden. As a poet, Ofeimun foregrounds issues that have to do with the dichotomy between the 'haves' and 'haves not', the oppressed and oppressors; as well as poor leadership, corruption, political insensitivity, military dictatorship, war, and the despoiled environment. The aggregation of the above socio-polit-

ical malaise in the Nigerian state is poeticized in the two collections: *The Poet Lied* and *Go tell the Generals*.

The Dialectics of Socio-Political Activism and Nationhood in the Poetry of Odia Ofeimun

The dialectics of nationhood is such that it can be interpreted from virtually the field of social sciences and humanities without running away from its forest of meanings. Nationhood can simply be described as a state of being a nation, or a large group of people united by common language, culture or economic life. Margaret Apine and Rogers Brubakar are two scholars who have separately interrogated the tenets of nationhood with regards to literature. According to Brubakar, nationhood is "an institutionalised form comprised of a pervasive system of social classification, an organising 'principle of vision and division' of the social world, a standardised scheme of social accounting, a legitimate form for public and private identities" (1994, 7). Apine, on the other hand, sees nationhood as a state where "citizens have surrendered their individual sovereignty to the state through a social contract that guarantees the provision of public goods" (2014, 5). What is inherent in the above definitions is that nationhood involves a social contract between the rulers and the ruled; that in any case, should a party renege from the contract, there would be consequences. As shall been shown later in this essay, the Nigerian elites have constantly reneged from

the contract that make for a true nationhood. Thus we shall in the course of this essay interrogate the indices of nationhood using Ofeimun's poetry as our artistic compass.

The two collections, *The Poet Lied* and *Go tell the Generals* resonate with the vituperations of anger against the corrupt and visionless leaders who have held the people down and dispossessed them of all that are due them as a people. In the poem "Their Excellencies" for instance, Ofeimun laments the distortion that has been done to the land by corrupt politicians whose only aim of coming to power is to defraud the state for their selfish aggrandisement. They are insensitive to the plight of the people they are 'elected' to govern. They also lack the capacity to reflect and dream of ways to develop and improve the country's economy that the common man may live a better life. The poet thus tells us that instead of improving the lots of the populace, the politicians,

> … move in their merry-go-rounds!
> Satiated, they have little stomach for reflections;
> though cups of misery over-brim
> in the eyes of every man woman and child
> sprawled out across their rounds….
>
> They have little stomach for reflections
> Though the faces of those they love may swim
> in the cry that is bleated out
> by the million lives numbed by want
> overawed by hunger… (*The Poet Lied*, 16)

What is inherent in the above lines is a nation deprived of all sense of humanity by those the people look up to, for social and political guidance. Ofeimun, like his contemporaries, are aware that the challenge that troubles the Nigerian state is one that needs urgent and practical solutions. Unfortunately, the populace are not ready to confront their oppressors. The poet tells us that the oppressors,

> …move in their merry-go-rounds
> oblivious of the grunts and groans
> deflowering the fabled laughter of our afternoons
> They do not see the shrunken bellies
> the harrowing faces out-lining their rounds
> (*The Poet Lied*, 16)

In the poem "A Footnote (1)" for instance, the poet decried the politicians who renege on their promises as soon as they get hold of power,

> in our model democracy
> the magic promises of yesterday
> lie cold like mounds of dead cattle
> along caravans that lead nowhere
>
> …..
> in our model democracy
> nothing is left of the old humour
> the sacked parliament of our collective desires
> appraise horizons burnt to dancing grey
> by tall threats, tall decrees, tall abominations
> (*The Poet Lied*, 6)

The poet exposes the politicians who, having attained political powers, put on the gab of ignorance – an ignorance of insensitivity to the plight of the people they had once promised to redeem. In their traumatised state, the helpless masses develop a severe attitude of apathy and docility even to their own state and continue in such predicaments until another group of oppressors come to catch up with their docility to exploit the remnant of their hopes. Thus, it can be argued that the contest of the political parties in Nigeria, since the attainment of independence in 1960, has often not been about serving the people, but about who should have the "ultimate right" to exploit them. To Ofeimun, therefore, the politicians cannot be trusted. In the poem, "The Messiahs" the poet tells us that the politicians whom he called messiahs:

> …are not doing a bad job
> the messiahs
> are still riding high
> on the fervid winged horses
> of their triumphal entry (The Poet Lied, 10)

The new messiahs are boastful and their modus operandi is the use of propaganda against perceived enemies. They claim improvements in different sectors of the economy that are only visible to them and their cronies, and not the impoverished masses. In order to make the people believe that they are working, they will tell lies and falsify statistics to show that things are going on well in the country.

Their harvest reports say
the barns explode
with tubers of plenty
all trees are watered
with scented alcohol
now they grow faster than they ever did
in the other dynasty

Their harvest reports
manure the earth
with hawking question marks
as if they were answers
as if they born
to feed on only harvest reports
on horseback
they issue the word: we dance
when our Sunday bests become rags
we spread palm-fronds on the roads
for their motorcades
(blessed are they that come!) (*The Poet Lied*, 10-11)

These are recurrent indices in the political landscape of Nigeria that a committed poet like Ofeimun cannot ignore. For in the craze to falsify developmental facts, praise-singers are recruited from all works of life to adumbrate their lies. Professors, pastors, imams including civil society organisations connived with the government to hoodwink the already pauperised masses. These are strategies adopted by the oppressors to soften the oppressed masses. In this regard, the poet adorns the

garb of such politicians to lampoon their pettiness.

> And we must hire praise-singers
> talking drummers. Be happy
> and why must we be sad
> when the Messiah are with us
> to hound us and butt-gun us
> into greater tomorrows. (*The Poet Lied,* 11)

The oppressors thus reign supreme through propaganda. And because there have always been a wide divide between the ruling elite and the masses, such propaganda easily find fertile earth in the heart of the people to germinate. This is the level of propaganda that brought in the All Progressive Congress (APC) into power in Nigeria in 2015. The party came with the symbol of broom to sweep away all the evils of the past government and the people fell for it. They rode into power in 2015 on sheer propaganda; making bogus promises that even the poor masses who supported them knew they won't fulfil. Yet, with the strong weapon of propaganda and the obvious desire to cause chaos in the land, they were allowed to rig themselves into power. But not too long, the people were shocked when they turn out to be a sheep of the old block. In the first stanza of the poem "The New Broom", the poet recreates the politicians' use of propaganda to the amusement of the reader:

> The streets were clogged with garbage
> the rank smell of swollen gutters
> claimed the peace of our lives (*The Poet Lied*, 6)

However, the poet does not want the people to sit back and wail as though their lives have ended. He wants them to resist all forms of oppression and reconsider their place in the socio-political dysfunction of the nation. He wants them to remember that of all nations that attained independence with Nigeria, it is only Nigeria that still remains stagnant in terms of social, economic and political development. On this level, the poet becomes not only the people's advocate, but an intellectual who uses his intellect to guide his people out of every social and political quagmire that they have been subjected to, by their oppressors. Okome informs us that Ofeimun is a public intellectual whose "publicness is the abiding string that links his poetry and social activism to the real lives that people live in contemporary Nigeria" (2012, 8). Uka adumbrates this role of the writer when he avers that the African writer should recognise his place as one who "is an intellectual and a writer, and strictly speaking not ingratiating the established corridors of power merely, but is committed to truth as he sees it, he must so shape his action that his own integrity is preserved at the same time that he influences policy" (1978, 22). This idea resonates poignantly in the poem, "Let's Consider".

> Remembering that in our muddled voyaging
> we always arrived at last
> at the point where we set out
> where we acquired un-healing wounds
> and the angry scars that still prefer us
> (*Go tell the Generals,* 74)

In this "remembering", the masses must know that their votes decide who should rule over them. They should jettison immediate aggrandisement in the form of 'stomach infrastructure' that the politicians always put forward whenever it is the time for elections. If they have failed before, they should not fail again by "remembering that we come back in season/to the shame that we cuddled on wanton habit" (*Go tell the Generals,* 74). What the poet has done with his lines here is to stir the people to reality - to rekindle their senses to the untoward hardship that is brought on them mainly from their negligence and docility. It is against the background that Okome tells us that a good poet uses his poetry to rekindle

> ...interest that extends the boundaries of the reader's sense of poetry as politics and culture, that deep-seated belief that words can actually translate into social actions; that words are indeed social relationships, and that words are divine tools with which the poet can change his/her environment (Okome 2002, 16).

Ofeimun, in the poem, accuses the people of being accomplices to their predicaments "remembering that we are never innocent/that our weakness makes us part of every crime/committed against us" (*Go tell the Generals*, 74). He therefore seeks the people's cooperation to change the tide of wretchedness in the land. To achieve this, the people must show signs of readiness. They must not be swayed by religious or ethnic leanings. They must be united against all forces of oppression as their op-

pressors are united against them irrespective of religion or ethnic affiliation. He charges the people thus,

> Let us not wonder, let's consider
> why those who supply the prophets
> also supply events in rituals
> that prove the prophets right.
> Let's consider the ways we consider
> the failure of sight
> that decrees the language
> of every street song (*Go tell the Generals*, 75)

In the above lines, the poet sought a progressive social ethos which could, at least, serve as the basis for an ordered, equitable and just society devoid of religious bickering, ethnicity, corruption and other vices that have kept the country on its toes. Ofeimun's idea of a just and egalitarian society is typified in the last four lines of the above poem. This is the vision Apronti wants the modern African writer to espouse in their works, a vision that calls for a progressive change in the society. According to him,

> …modern African writer must be in the forefront of those who are causing progressive change in Africa and that this is one way in which he can demonstrate immediately his relevance to his people in the one hand, and on the other his right to take the place of his traditional counterparts in our modern society (Apronti 1978, 78).

The foregoing is a reminder to the corrupt leaders that the people are prepared to take their destinies into their own hands. They are ready to confront oppression in all its spheres until victory is achieved. In order to displace the selfish rulers who trade the collective fortunes of the people for selfish gains, all hands must be on deck.

For instance, Ofeimun goes on in the poem "Rap Anti-Text" to foreground how the people's collective power can put the oppressors in great discomfort. He uses military images and revolutionary motifs fashioned in the style of Yeats' "Second Coming" to strengthen his social vision and call on the collective will of the people to match in protest against their political overlords. He says:

> In the shaman's brew
> that the General made
> thighs fell apart
> for the centre to hold
> in brawling carnivals
> tattooing the streets
> with rented mobs
> and circuses
> the falcon flew
> with the falconer in tow
> turning and turning
> in constricting gyres
> till reason's somersault
> darkness unloosened

thighs fell apart
    the General appeared
thighs fell apart
    and the General fled (*Go tell the Generals*, 78)

To Ofeimun, the people must be prepared to pay the ultimate sacrifice of revolution in order to redeem the land from the hands of their corrupt leaders. As Ojaide affirms, Ofeimun's activism "ranges in the side of the common people and is at the vanguard of forces struggling against tyranny, dictatorship, oppression, injustice, and other socio-political vices so as to establish humane and democratic values" (2012,11).

Ofeimun's social vision rests in the belief that whenever the oppressed people of the land come together, as one to confront their exploiters, victory will be sure. Ngugi wa Thiong'o agrees with this ideology when he tells us that: "A people united can never be defeated and the writer must be part and parcel of that revolutionary unity for democracy, socialism and the liberation of the human spirit to become even more human" (2007, 164). The lines below foreground the above vision:

The General fled
    to a bush of ghost
as blood-dimmed tides
    set the nine dogs growling
        (*Go tell the Generals*, 79)

Thus, in his poetry, especially those that foreground the indices of dispossession of his people of the Niger Delta, Ofeimun conveys the true state of affairs in Nigeria where a people whose region produces the crude oil wealth that sustains the entire country live in abject poverty. Ofeimun's commitment to the literature that points to this fact; that is, the social imbalance in the Nigerian political structure is well documented in the section "Children of the Creeks" in *Go tell the Generals*. The unbridled capitalist onslaught on the Niger Delta and the aftermath of this uncanny state-sanctioned assault are given prominence in the poem, "Children of the Creeks".

> The children of the creeks
> cried for hands to raise
> the sky that loomed
> too close to the earth
> they prayed for the old days
> of timber and palm oil
> to return to the mangroves
> …
>
> What forbearance
> the earth demands of those
> whose crops are pulped
> to mud and black kaolin
> by ill-will, ill-done
> and by prayers that turn
> every fish belly-up

> The children of the creeks
> yelled in searing electrodes;
> as evergreen trees roasted
> in the haggle of loot-sharers
> who staled the Delta
> for the very last overcoming
> of the Lower Niger. (*Go tell the Generals*, 89)

The poem above is quoted at length to expose the footprints and horrors of multinationals' presence and activities in the Niger Delta. The activities not only crush the biodiversity of the delta, but also impoverished the inhabitants. The poet's message is captured in bold relief by the use of imagery, contrast, irony, hyperbole and other devices to depict – the unprecedented suffering to which the people of the Niger Delta are subjected.

Similar dislocation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is also examined in the poem "Memory II". In this poem, the poet tells us that as soon as oil was discovered in large quantity in the Niger Delta, the people's fate was sealed. This is because the oil multinationals and the Nigerian government that benefit from the crude oil resources of the people care less about their environment and their wellbeing. The poet laments thus:

> We knew only after
> the explosion in our creeks
> we'd forgotten the wisdom of the ancients

who saw our faces smeared in unbidden foil
bloating human cattle in the sun
grown beyond recognition
as the rain of fire from the rigs
took over the night sky,
swept mangroves and mushed the rivers
soiling earth-wombs, our haven of ages
….
We knew only after the explosion in our creeks
of the new deities arriving
with the grimace of giant caterpillars
monsters bigger than ships and houses
who felled pythons and crocodiles
wounded siblings driven
from rare waters
to be buried with our dead
in mass graves (*Go tell the Generals*, 87-8)

Inherent in the above poem are the images of destruction, devastation and exploitation that reverberates the tyranny of the Nigerian state against the people of the Niger Delta region of the country. The people are daily roasted by the "…the rain of fire from the rigs" which "took over the mighty sky". This "rain of fire" comes from the various gas flares in the Niger Delta that pollute the environment. The pollution of these flares have "swept mangroves and mushed the rivers/soiling earth-wombs, our haven of ages". In other words, the people's sources of livelihood that have sustained them over the years are destroyed by the activities of the oil compa-

nies without any mitigating measures to ameliorate the suffering of the people. Thus, the deaths of python and crocodiles through the activities of the oil multinationals only foreground the death of all that the people held sacred in their environment. The poet's lamentation is a protest against the outright ecological devastation of the Niger Delta by the oil companies in collaboration with the Nigerian state. The poet, in this poem, speaks truth to the conscience of the oppressors of his people by artistically recreating the evils of oil exploration in the Niger Delta. This is why Ojaide believes that, "in the narrative of the gradual and persistent march towards true democracy in Nigeria, Ofeimun's poetic output and practice together with his activism outside the book have facilitated the process that will make Nigeria a nation of humane and democratic values" (2012, 25).

As part of Ofeimun's commitment to the Niger Delta struggles, he identifies with the masses and front runners of the liberation struggles. In particular, he offers outright condemnation of the state murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other martyrs of the Ogonis by Abacha military junta on November 10, 1996. Though the murder of the nine activists acted as a major setback to the struggle of the Niger Delta emancipation, Ofeimun, through his poetry, gives a voice to the struggle for the meaningful survival of his people. This idea finds expression in his poem, "Ken" written in three cantos in the collection *Go tell the Generals.*

> I
> Now, when they talk about the Niger Delta
> they will know neither sleep nor cover
> no longer indifferent to creeks and rivers
> the green earth defoliated by gas flares
> fishing havens blacked out by murky oil
> crops withering in the mush of toxic foil
> they will remember the ghost they invited
> an angry first son who'd re-invented
> patriachates, roping death to his side
> in favour of truth that'll outlast every tide
> (Go tell the Generals, 99)

Ordinarily, the gruesome murder of his colleagues would have instilled a terrible fear in him to shut his mouth. Instead, he opts to eulogize them. This bravery finds resonance in the statement of G.G Darah when he affirms that:

> The struggles of the oppressed and exploited nations of the Niger Delta have also added a new dialectics to the methodology of popular uprising in post-colonial Africa. The images of a mass movement, martyrdom and guerrilla fighters which were hitherto strange in Nigeria have become familiar as a result of these experiences (Darah 2010, 3).

Apronti supports this view when he asserts that "our writers being an important segment of our intelligentsia are duty-bound to take on this assignment" (1978, 88).

Thus Ofeimun gives a sense of optimism in the poem when he assures the people that the enemy of the Niger Delta,

> …will know neither sleep nor cover
> While the beaten of the creeks bend double
> bearing the weight of elephant and rhino
> who claim right by size and touted presence
> from wrong to ever lucrative wrong
> hearing no voice of conscience but the chink
> of coins, slush of paper money, and harems
> throbbing with license while gas flares
> warn the beleaguered of the Delta to stand up:
> "we cant abandon fights that wont abandon us"
> (*Go tell the Generals*, 100)

Like the Russian writer, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn once stated, "the great writer goes on 'constituting a kind of second government', thereby making those in office, those who wield authority, uneasy in their saddle, as long as they do not ride perfectly on honesty, till they heed the warning, message, and ideas which the writer envisions, even predicts" (quoted in Uka 23).

In "Memory II", Ofeimun celebrates the bold voices of the oppressed who defy death to confront their oppressors. The oppressors think by killing their leaders, the people of the Niger Delta would succumb to their powers. As a poet, he is part of the struggle to liberate his people from the shackles of oppression. This is why

Ogungbesan explains that the act of artistic creation in the most profound sense "is a moral and political act". According to him, "the writer's individualism is not only the highest form of protest and insurance against tyranny – from any political system – but also the deepest affirmation of the most everlasting truth" (Ogungbesan 1978, 18). Ofeimun therefore makes his poetry send sleepless ditties to the oppressors:

> that poetry works! Above the ruse of power,
> hate decrees and the hundred and twenty eight
> ways to homicide fashioned by mongrels
> who tie pythons round the waist of the Delta
> to defeat hope and suffocate dreams (*Go tell the Generals*, 101)

Furthermore, he warns the oppressors that it is not yet time for them to celebrate because their evils against the people will surely catch up with them. He says:

> … and when they ask why
> the age-grade still meet
> at the public square, tell them
> it is for those who will not
> abandon a fight
> because they've lost a pathfinder
> (*Go tell the Generals*, 103)

The struggle to redeem the land must continue because victory against all forces of oppression and dispossession is sure. It is a collective struggle in which every-

one, including the poet, must be ready to take up arms against the oppressors even when their lives are at risk. Ogungbesan confirms this view when he notes that "if it is necessary to throw bombs in order to change society, then the writer must recognise his obligations to his society and throw as many bombs as possible. After all his own safety may depend on it" (Ogungbesan 1978, 4). Here, the poet does not absolve himself from the struggle that affects the people; he must walk hand-in-hand with them in other to reclaim the land. He exhorts the people thus:

…If they hang your dog
Kill their cow

If they steal your purse
Burn their house

If they bring down your plane
Sink their ship

If they bring plagues to your door
Don't cry

till their councils
teem with arson and broken totems
…
So that none would believe it ever again
That your palms alone
Are made for slave potions (*Go tell the Generals,* 90)

The above lines are in consonance with the position of Ngugi wa Thiong'o when he says that the committed writer should not only use his works to comment on the ills of the society, s/he must march in front of the oppressed in order to reclaim the society from the hands of the oppressors. Hence he says:

> As the struggle continues and intensifies, the lot of the writer in a neo-colonial state will become harder and not easier […]. The African writer ... the one who opts for becoming an integral part of the African revolution, has no choice but that of aligning himself with the people: their economic, political and cultural struggle for survival […]. He must be part of the song the people sing as once again they take up arms to smash the neo-colonial state to complete the anti-imperialist national democratic revolution they had started in the fifties, and even earlier. (wa Thiong'o 2007, 164)

In the poem entitled "I feel the need to Scream" Ofeimun assumes the voice of the voiceless in exposing the series of monumental failures that obfuscate the Nigerian political landscape. His sense of history in the poem is enlivened with the vivid presentation of the anomalies that have held the country down over the years. He therefore put on the garb of a rebel to quest for an ideal society because the corruption and oppression in the country nauseate him. And because his words can be misinterpreted by the oppressors, he must scream on papers for all to see and read.

I feel the need to scream
on paper.
The decadence in the air
grates on the iron petal
my will to survival

Trickles of irremediable days
Unawakened suns

I feel the need to scream
my lungs dry
till sands burn in my veins
till the rebel in me tastes
the pollens of another sage-hood (*The Poet Lied*, 10)

Further in the poem, Ofeimun decries the flamboyant lifestyle of these politicians who govern the people in impunity. The recklessness with which they gamble with the nation's fortune heightens the uncertainty and frustration that have become the lots of the poor masses. The lines below give credence to this point:

Scream! I want to scream
my refusal to let the acid infamy
of these days trample under
my faith in the coming footfalls of dawn
(*The Poet Lied*, 10)

The lines above not only evoke the poet's desire to change as well as rid the society of all that offend the

cultural ethos of the land, but resonate with metaphors of revolution which is the foreseeable way of redeeming the land from the clutches of political dispossession. His patience has turned to anger, and his anger, to reaction. He therefore seeks to act, believing, like Rotimi says: "to sit down and do nothing is to be crippled quickly" (Rotimi 1971, 6). Thus, in order to re-right the sundry wrongs perpetuated on the people of the Nigerian state and at the same time redeem the oppressed masses, he must refuse "to let the acid infamy/of these days trample under/my faith in the coming footfalls of dawn". This is what Freire calls "the greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (1982, 21).

Conclusion

To sum up, Ofeimun is the people's poet. He not only feels but shares in the pains, fear and aspiration of the dispossessed masses of Africa, especially his Nigerian people. His poetry protests against the debasing status that have become the lots of the Nigerian populace and at the same time, he charges the people to rise above petty sentiment, even at a price, to confront their oppressors headlong in order to enthrone social justice and fair play in the Nigerian state. On matters dealing with oil exploration and the consequent degradation of life, property, and the environment of the Niger Delta, Ofeimun refuses to compromise his faith of a better society.

Thus, in his stockpile of weapon, to use the words of Uka, he "boasts oratory which can move a populace to action, as if it can move a mountain, because the oratory is faith, not camouflage. This faith can project into the future, beyond the present power holders and the writer himself" (1978, 24). Ojaide, a fellow compatriot of Ofeimun therefore asserts that,

> Ofeimun has deployed a large measure of his talent and resources to cope with the postcolonial society of the post-independence Nigerian nation and done so with singular dedication that is unparalleled in his generation of writers. He has used his poetic works and socio-political activism to sustain attention and struggle to build true democratic governance with justice, fairness, propriety and other virtues to his credit.(2012, 24-25)

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Shooting, Not Crying: Reckoning with Violence in *Prisoners of War*, *Homeland* and *Fauda*

Omri Ben Yehuda

The Jew, the Arab, and Western Imagination

Enmeshed in the most momentous political crises in its history, on the eve of a third election in a single year taking place under the threat of the coronavirus pandemic, Israel overlooked a remarkable achievement. One of the many surveys and lists offering a cultural summation of the decade, was that of *The New York Times* with its selection of best international television series (Hale 2019). It was not surprising to find the United Kingdom with six entries among the list's top ten, alongside France and Italy with one representative each. Howev-

er, Israel's appearance directly after the UK, with two entries, one of them being the prestigious newspaper's top pick, certainly defied expectations. Its Netflix thriller *Fauda* (2016-) was nominated in seventh place and its drama-thriller *Prisoners of War* (2009-2011, hereafter *POW*), which was the inspiration for the Showtime hit *Homeland* (2011-2020), headed the list.

This news attracted little attention in a land inured to frequent states of emergency. It has, however, many important ramifications: it reflects again the quality and impact of Israeli television (in the previous decade the Israeli series *BeTipul* [2005-2008] inspired a groundbreaking American adaptation [*In Treatment* 2008-2010] and sparked a complete reevaluation of the possibilities of the medium), and attests to Israel's preeminence abroad, especially in the United States and more importantly among liberal cultural forces such as *The New York Times*. The fact that almost the entire list (consisting of 30 series) was self-evidently western (apart from Canada or Australia, each with one representative, the only non-European representatives were two South Korean series, one Argentinian and one Indian), reflects both the way Israel perceives itself as an integral part of the West, and also the way the West, especially the arbiters of its liberal taste, embraces that as a given. This is highlighted by the complete absence of other entries from the Middle East and by the fact that Hebrew was the only Semitic language represented in the selected series.

It is even more thought-provoking when we consider that the two Israeli series deal specifically with Israel's conflictual relations with the Arab world, and that in both of them the relationship between Jew and Arab is unraveled intimately by means of performance, where the secular, modern and westernized Jew acts out the figure of the Muslim believer and his devotional rituals. A significant part of the second season of *POW* takes place beyond Israel's borders, in Syria, and the presence of Arabic becomes increasingly widespread as many of the figures are either Syrians or Palestinians with Israeli citizenship (who are so intimately linked to the north of the country and its continuity with Syria, depicted also by the tunnels running beneath the border) and the Israeli prisoners of war themselves who acquire fluency in the language. This trope is taken to its extreme in Fauda, where Arabic takes over as the predominant language in large sections of the show, half of the characters being Palestinian and the other half Jews whose native-level fluency in Arabic was acquired in the theater of *Mista'aravim*, where soldiers perform as Arabs in order to infiltrate the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza. In terms of accuracy, such complete command of the language is unattainable, but in Fauda, for the sake of the drama, this Jewish theater of Islam is a theater perhaps too well-performed (Ben Yehuda 2020).

Israel made its way onto The *NYT's* list, a compilation of high quality, western and liberal but at the same time

popular culture, by impersonating Islam, the West's political and historical archenemy from the crusades, through the Ottoman Empire and right until ISIS. It is clear that the *NYT's* Israel-centered view does not reflect the entire versatile relationship between Americans and Europeans with Muslims. It attests nonetheless to the high currency of Jews and of Zionism, even among the more liberal (and of course among many in the right as was so evident in the pro-Israeli Trump administration). Perhaps unwittingly, the Jewish-Israeli warrior provides the filter through which the West is able to access the East. Embracing the Jew as part of the Christian West is a theologically historical gesture that the *NYT's* survey reanimates: a twofold gesture that crosses European boundaries by importing one Semite (the Jew) to the West at the expense of distancing another Semite (the Arab).

From Psychology to Action

Stephen Shapiro has shown the difference between Homeland and its Israeli predecessor *POW* that suggests an evolutionary narrative of continuation on which I wish to elaborate and use as the basis for my discussion. Relating to the two series' narratives, Shapiro rightly observes that "if *Hatufim* (*POW*) was unusual for concentrating in its first season on the soldier's emotional state after their liberation, *Homeland* quickly moves back to the familiar geopolitical suspense [...] Whereas *Hatufim* is

committed to reiterating the stability of the Israeli state, *Homeland* highlights US institutional fragility" (Shapiro 2015, 157). Shapiro does not elaborate on this "moving back to the familiar geopolitical suspense," but I believe he points to *Homeland's* closer adherence to the genre of the classic thriller. Indeed, *POW* might be conceived as embracing two plot lines: the first season is dedicated to the Israeli family and familial structures (including the state which for obvious reasons is more intimately placed in relation to its citizens than in America) with a loose plot that centers on a psychological reckoning with a past that has been lost (the three soldiers spent seventeen years in captivity). On the other hand, in an abrupt change of focus, the second season brings the genre of the thriller to the fore, with many scenes filmed not only in Israel but beyond its borders in enemy territory. Nonetheless, Shapiro's comments on *Homeland* require some qualification: although the series does indeed minimalize some features, reducing the number of returnee protagonists from three to only one, and shortening the period of captivity to "only" eight years so as to intensify suspense, *Homeland* is still far from being strictly an action series. Perhaps its most conspicuous trait – and its fundamental departure from *POW* – is its focus on a heroine who is neither one of the prisoners, nor a member of their families, but rather the investigator herself. Whereas in *POW* there are three main investigators, two of whom are men and the third, Iris (Sendi Bar), an emotionally detached and single-minded femme fatale, *Home-*

land chooses to view the events not through the eyes of the victims but from the idiosyncratic and extraordinary perspective of a fragile woman with heightened emotional sensitivity and a sophisticated inner world, who is also a member of the establishment. Carrie's flat is the window into her entire world where objects from her work and her private life collide; portraits of Black American jazz musicians (we normally associate Islam with Arabs, but Islam is also an integral part of the Black-African world) decorate her walls alongside pictures of her targets, all of whose color and overt masculinity stand in stark contrast to her own fair-skinned and very western femininity. It is perhaps not surprising that there is not even one image of what might serve as her office at the CIA headquarters, and we learn right at the outset through the remarkable opening title sequence (that has been the focus of many studies), that terrorist or geopolitical intricacies are in fact an integral part of her upbringing. Islam and America's sense of homeland is clearly not simply a plot device, but represents rather the entire spectrum of the human experience embedded into the psyche during childhood.

Although *POW* admittedly devotes an unusual amount of attention to the "soldier's emotional state," *Homeland* is not entirely dissimilar in that respect. Both series play with the genres of thriller and psychological drama in very different ways. Whereas *POW's* protagonists are victims trying to readjust to the shattered order of their

civilian families, *Homeland's* single heroine (who is both an unattached woman and a lone protagonist) is not only unique in her embodiment of a deviation from the model of the all-American family, but also an active investigator who possesses far more of the agency required for her actions, as well as a sense of accountability for them.

These tensions relating to America's perception of the Arab world and the Middle East are also evident in the Israeli case, notwithstanding its many particularities. In this article I examine the ostensibly poetic transition from psychology to action in the context of Israeli television. I suggest a historiographical wave which begins with *POW* as a representative of the end of the first decade of the millennium and concluding with *Fauda*'s last season that was broadcast a decade later during an unprecedented political crisis (overlapping in its last stages with the Coronavirus pandemic). From its first season *Fauda* emerged as a groundbreaking Israeli thriller, unique in its adherence to a gripping plot that centers on action, hardly allowing any room for psychological reflection. This has important ramifications for an understanding of the latent ethos of Israeli citizenship: the diminishing space allotted to reflecting on deeds undermines the defining attribute in the representation of Israeli warriors – their conscience.

Fauda unfolds as a perpetual acting out of an endless cycle of revenge that shatters the possibility of any reck-

oning with historical dimensions or with accountability,[1] culminating in its third season in an unprecedented confrontation with Israeli violence and an admission, unselfconsciously and proudly made before an audience that included Netflix's international subscribers, that Israel's acts of aggression perpetrated against civilians are de facto war crimes. *Fauda*'s first season begins as a disturbing reenactment of the aftermath of the Oslo accords and the Second Intifada when Hamas and Jihad suicide bombers wrought terror on civilian targets in Israeli cities. The first season was shot fifteen years after these events, with no historical link to them other than the constant performance of suicide bombings. This was not the case in the third season. The plot focuses on Gaza, now the main site of the active Palestinian struggle and the butt of the retaliatory rounds of violence with Israel, as evidenced also in its ongoing political crisis (a wave of Qassam rockets preceded every one of the five electoral rounds). As I will show, unlike the first season, specific historical references are incorporated into a scene that accumulates to a rare and disturbing confrontation in Israeli history with its state inflicted violence.

Raya Morag has shown that the Second Intifada's retaliatory actions conform to Robert Jay Lifton's definition of the rationale for war crimes, namely an ideology that equates resistance with acts of terror and seeks to justify almost any action, or an environment where sanctioned brutality becomes the norm (Morag 2013, 148). The

change of narrative accompanying the change of ideology between *POW* (via *Homeland*) and *Fauda* relies on events at the turn of the millennium: The Second Intifada which was gradually consumed by the attacks of 9/11 on the other side of the Atlantic (both events have many predecessors, the most crucial of which is probably the Gulf War, which also erupted just a few years after the First Intifada). It also runs parallel to Netanyahu's second and seemingly never-ending term of office starting in 2009, escalating during the term of the exclusively right-wing coalition comprising his fourth government which has now consolidated in the Netanyahu block with the ultra-orthodox parties (to gain eventually an absolute majority in the current Israeli regime). One of the most prominent catchphrases during those years (which perfectly coincided with the airing of *Fauda*) was "*mafsikim le-hitnatzel*!" (no more apologizing!) which probably originated with the 2015 campaign slogan of the right-wing party "*Ha-bayit ha-yehudi*"'s (The Jewish Home) – "No more apologizing: we love Israel" – that later infiltrated into all sides of the political spectrum and referred to the hypocrisy of the establishment's left wing and to a lesser degree to the liberal Right[2].

No More Apologizing – No More Justifying

The motto "No more apologizing!" has many parallels in the world, notably the many new right-wing regimes (in Central and Eastern Europe and in the United States)

that champion the patriotism that was allegedly lost during the long years of globalized "bon ton" and political correctness. This is a double-edged sword: it aims to abolish the diplomatic restraint of the state which, given that state apparatuses are suppressive by nature, could justifiably be understood as inherent hypocrisy,[3] but along the way it also dispenses with conscience and the process of self-scrutiny and accountability. The two trends collide at the point where reckoning with violence actually signifies its justification.

The justification of violence is perhaps one of the most complex and intricate psychological apparatuses of human rhetoric, literature and the arts; indeed, of human politics. It is particularly salient during a national struggle, and for this reason provides the focus of scrutiny in Hannan Hever's many studies on Hebrew and Israeli literature throughout the Jewish struggle for self-determination, a project that was brought to fruition through the disenfranchisement of the Palestinian national struggle. Throughout the years the conscience of the Israeli warrior, which Morag also delineates as a trauma of the perpetrator, was embodied in the dictum "shooting and crying."[4] The nucleus of this cultural chiastic apprehension of the act of a justified – that is, always *justifiable* – war can be found in the early stories of S. Yizhar relating to Israel's War of Independence of 1948 which caused the Palestinian catastrophe (the loss of the bulk of their land and population through flight or expulsion, and the

birth of the Palestinian refugee problem that persists until today). Yizhar's stories *Khirbet Khizeh* and *The Prisoner*, both published directly after the war, together with the poetry of Yehuda Amichai which is similarly concerned with the transmutation of Palestine into Israel, form the pillars of Hever's work in their exemplification of Israel's conscience and its deliberations regarding sovereignty over the country's indigenous population. Rather than engaging with the dismal situation of the Palestinians they seek to render a unified and coherent Israeli subject who embodies the events leading to the establishment of the state (Hasak-Lowy 2012, 33); these events can be traced back to the summer of 1948 when the course of the war changed from defense (and even, according to the warriors, fears for the end of the Jewish people) to attack and the adoption of an active policy of transferring populations by Mapai, the leading Jewish party of that time (Morris 2003, 442-449).

Unsurprisingly, as in *Fauda*, and to a lesser but still significant extent *POW* and *Homeland* as well, Yizhar's stories bypass any sense of time and historicity, evading thereby the standpoint of a sovereign entity accountable for its actions (Setter 2012, 48). This corresponds as well with Yizhar's acclaimed descriptions of space, reflected in his narrator's poetic and gifted rendering of the Land of Israel, which defer his historical judgement (Hever 2019, 113). As early as the 1980s the critic Uri Shoham faulted Yizhar's narrator for his excessive soul-searching and

ambivalence that are eventually resolved in the ultimate struggle – the abstract and a-historical depiction of nature (Quoted in Hever, Ibid., 111-112). Thus for both Shoham and Hever, Yizhar's narrator, who is a first person witness, is a parallelized narrator, whose indecisiveness exempts him from any categorical moral imperative of resolution (Ibid., 86, 111-112).

Hever finds the same gesture in Amichai, one of the champions of Israeli civic (and not nationalistic) ethos, whose use of irony deprives his speaker of the ability to comprehend reality and hence normalizes the political state of exception (185). At the end, this speaker's protest, like that of Yizhar's narrator, develops into a position of aporetic embarrassment (194). Similarly, Yael Ben-Zvi Morad discusses new Israeli films that concentrate on this shattered manhood, and points out their self-sacrificial gestures which are drawn from Israeli literature's fascination with the figure of Christ as a universal response to the traumatic reality reigning in Israel since its inception: "His morality is strengthened by the conflict he feels in the face of his own sovereignty" (Ben-Zvi Morad 2017, 236).[5]

The mimetic representation of a conflicted and complex conscience is therefore by no means a prerequisite for political responsibility; on the contrary, it perhaps deprives readers of any actual agency. Questions we ask ourselves could affirm our positions as much as they

could unsettle. The words of Sadia Abbas are especially illuminating here: "Self-consciousness itself is merely one more swirl in the ever-tightening gyre of reflexive sophistication, enlisted for an exemption it cannot bestow" (Abbas 2013, 185).[18] Contradictory as it may seem, justification is perhaps one of the first means of reaction to trauma. My argument here does not imply a value judgement of the works discussed: those of Yizhar and Amichai and the film *Waltz with Bashir* from 2008 that exhibits an unprecedented confrontation with the trauma of the perpetrator, are all, like the series under discussion in this study, very sophisticated works. But *Bashir* is a strong example of how psychology, as a mean to use excessive, deep and even esthetic speech (evident also in the use of animation), is also used in order to ease the tormented mind in a cathartic act which the genre of the thriller does not allow. In *Bashir*, one could even argue that the process of psychologization serves to displace the trauma (in this case, the Sabra and Shatila massacre) from the victim to the perpetrator.

Before returning to a more detailed discussion of these points (and especially to *Homeland* which is distinguished by the complex personality of Carrie as the series' principal narrative agent), I would like to conclude the historical discussion I attempt to delineate here, by arguing that shooting is of course still present, but now the shooters do not cry. Gil Hochberg has already noted this and has traced it to the twilight of the long decade of Netanya-

hu's administration as reflected in one of the video clips she examined that was produced by the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation to welcome visitors to the Israeli Eurovision in 2019.[6] In the upbeat clip, the two television hosts sing a song about the land of milk and honey which acknowledges the occupation, and also tell several jokes that contain anti-Semitic comments indicating their awareness of unflattering stereotypes about Israel (Hochberg 2019). As with Yizhar (and many other prominent figures that Hever discusses), the sophisticated subjects are aware of the violence for which they are responsible, but whereas previously they were tormented, crying has now "been replaced with laughter: hysterical, cynical, crude, perhaps even desperate laughter" (Ibid.).

I concur with Hochberg's opinion. The period leading up to the Eurovision witnessed another significant, albeit diametrically opposed, event that captured the headlines in the Israeli media during that time: The weekly protest "The March of Return," which every Friday sent Gazans – almost all of whom domestic refugees as a result of the events of 1948 – to the border separating the Gaza strip from their forbidden homeland. These occurrences coincided with one of the most troubling days in Israel's history. On the Friday after Netta Barzilai, the Israeli delegate to the Eurovision in Lisbon, won the contest, many young Israelis, almost exclusively liberal and LGTBQ-friendly (the Eurovision is affiliated

with the LGBTQI+ community), gathered in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square to celebrate the achievement and the political message of feminism, liberty and tolerance carried by Barzilai's song. Just sixty-five kilometers to the south, on the very same Mediterranean shore and under the same jurisdiction, fifty Palestinians protesters were shot to death by the Israeli army. I suggest that this marks the point of no return on the road to a sacrifice of conscience – even one that is defeated, narcissistic, shameful or paralyzed as in Yizhar – in favor of celebration. The question which I refrain from answering at this stage – it requires perhaps a thorough study of its own that should address Israeli ethos as a Mizrahi one – is whether this shift is actually of progress, meaning of acknowledging one's actions. It is not surprising perhaps that Netanyahu's 4th administration was also a Mizrahi renaissance and the embrace of pluralism and identity politics by the state at the expense of the Universalistic-Zionist traditional ethos.[7]

Admitting Jewish Violence: Gaza and the Third Season of *Fauda*

For this reason, I wish to dwell further on *Fauda's* last season, which is the crystallization of this newly-acquired Israeli political and cultural self-understanding of violence that I attempt to delineate here, before returning to earlier manifestations of the hardened and hesitant exercises of conscience in the confrontation with

war. In *Fauda*, as a rule, one shoots, and does not cry. In the series' defining gesture, its protagonist Doron Kavillio (Lior Raz) advances with his gun poised to fire during one of the team's many incursions into enemy territory (usually civilian homes or buildings). He leads the operation, covered by other soldiers from behind as his backup, and in line with the criteria of the genre, he is caught in the aporetic moment of who will pull the trigger first. And he shoots: there is no toll kept, numerical or ethical, of the number of people he kills throughout the series. Like all members of the Israeli elite unite, he is trained not to think or feel. This suppression of thought and emotion is a recurrent leitmotif running through all four seasons, epitomized in the very brief interludes in which the characters are permitted to engage in self-reflection.[8]

Fauda acknowledges violence, it does not "apologize," and this is the source of its charm as well as its dubious ramifications. It portrays state violence as being outside the law and adheres to militia-like qualities that have, in fact, historical roots in Israeli warfare right from the outset.[9] On the one hand the series' cruel and direct portrayal of violence is authentic, thereby drawing a parallel between the Jewish state and Islamic organizations such as Hamas and even Isis (in the second season) – in that, it is perhaps more audacious than *POW*, and certainly more daring than *Homeland*, whose antagonists tend to be the corrupt political officials of the American government rather than Muslims – but on the other hand it

captures the lives of Israelis and Palestinians exclusively through the prism of the Schmittian dichotomy of friend and foe (Ben Yehuda 2020, 11-12).

From the outset, the series conveys a false impression of symmetry between the two groups, dissolving in effect the distinction between Israel "proper" and the territories it occupies. The parity thus created between the sides makes crossing over from the territories into Israel appear feasible to both sides. The third season goes so far as to enable the Israeli undercover unit to invade Gaza, breaking the more than ten-year old siege, which reshuffles the long policy to avoid invading Gaza's soil and thus to practice Israeli heroism only from the air. It even allows – and this stretches credibility to its limits – the antagonist Bashir and his Hamas commando group to break the siege and enter Israel (an event last reported on in the media in 2006 with the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit). The billboards advertising the third season displayed the message "Welcome to Gaza," in English with Hebrew transliteration, echoing an utterance made by Elli (Ya'akov Zada-Daniel), the senior soldier and commander of the Israeli unit in the series and the only one to have actually been in Gaza before the siege. His "welcoming" utterance was issued as a warning against entering the prohibited and dangerous territories Israelis try to avoid. Elli is also the only member of the group to suffer from panic attacks, a fact that hinders their operations. Ironically, this Hebrew inscrip-

tion recalls the anticipation preceding the Eurovision in Tel Aviv just a year previously, as many billboards welcomed the foreign delegations and tourists who entered Israel's haven of tolerance and liberal values, the first Hebrew city. In both cases, the signs presented an exotic outside, one of which wholly desirable (the utopia of Europe and Tel Aviv) and the other to be avoided (Gaza as dystopia).

The art of militia warfare was developed by the Jewish self-defense organizations in Russia, Eastern Europe and Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century and, as mentioned earlier, continued to influence the conduct of Israel's sovereign army.[10] The third season portrays the ultimate manifestation of the absence of self-doubt with regard to the unleashing of unrestrained violence against Palestinians, which demonstrates incontrovertibly that in the eyes of Israelis, Palestinian lives do not matter and they are not grievable.[11] This is already in evidence in the season's first episode when Dana (Meirav Shirom), the *shin bet* (Israel's Security Agency) female interrogator, questions a Hamas soldier who is hooked up to an infusion pump in an Israeli hospital. When he refuses to cooperate, she tampers with the pump while physically "shaking" him (a notorious torture method forbidden by the Israeli Supreme Court). He finally capitulates, revealing his identity (Khamid, born and raised in the Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza strip), as his pacemaker subsides into a long monotonous beep. This

is the only scene (thirty-six minutes into the episode) in the season that refers to the refugees, a rare moment that could have become a reference for Yizhar's depiction of one of the expelled children in *Khirbet Khizeh* (1949), where the narrator predicts that the boy will become a terrorist in order to avenge his people. In *Fauda*, however, this information is glossed over in a minor and brief scene between two very marginal characters. Nonetheless, this presents a completely new ethos in Israeli self-perception: it was clearly not the intention of the series' creators to arouse any form of uneasiness, never mind repulsion, in the face of Dana's behavior. On the contrary, her actions are meant to be viewed as appropriate behavior for an interrogator, implying that violence is perpetrated against Palestinians unquestioningly and with impunity. The same is true of the use of physical power against civilian women in Fauda's third season, which here as well is not intended to raise viewers' eyebrows, suggesting again the dubious value Israelis attach to Palestinian lives. This is the case with Bashir's mother and sister. Bashir, who at the start of the series is a naive youth unaware that he is a tool in the hands of the Israelis, is abandoned without a second thought when they have to choose between his life and the lives of Israeli citizens. And from the moment he becomes the antagonist, the Israeli team (the heroes of the series with whom the viewers are meant to identify) torture his mother and sister by shaking and almost strangling them, although neither of them are in any way fighters.

The main scenes concerning the measure of power inflicted on civilians relate to Hilla Bashan (Marina Maximillian), the beautiful head of the Secret Service's Gaza department who becomes Doron's lover. Hilla has failed to locate the whereabouts of the Gazan arch-terrorist Hanni al-Ja'abari (Georges Iskander) who has been targeted for assassination. In the fourth episode, at minute 25, she tells Doron of the time when she worked as a young desk analyst following events in Gaza during "Protective Edge" (the military operation in the summer of 2014 known among Palestinian as the Gaza War), a rare historical detail indicating that the third season probably takes place in our present (2019-2020). Back then, she was able to trace Hanni to his villa in the Jebalia neighborhood, where he was surrounded by his five children (aged 5 to 15), two wives, other relatives and bodyguards. After Israel's Minister of Defense himself called her to confirm Hanni's location ("I suddenly realized they were really going to fire a rocket on the house, with all the wives and children and grandmothers"), the operation fails as Hanni escapes through a tunnel accompanied by seven wounded family members. Hilla rationalizes by explaining that Hanni was responsible for the murder of dozens of Israelis, and that after this operation he carried out many other bloody attacks of revenge.

This is a rare admission of immorality on the part of the IDF, a body whose superior morality has become a cliché of Israeli propaganda. However, after examining

this with J.D. Sari Bashi, it seems that *Fauda*'s depiction is not only accurate but in fact complies with international law. The law has no interest in the history of the conflict and in the condition of an ongoing conflict between a state and a particular civilian population, and therefore it allows "*proportionality*," that is, it permits the killing of civilians if the operation will prevent the deaths of Israeli citizens. Nonetheless, I believe that this is a paradigmatic scene because it does not adhere to "shooting and crying." Hilla's conscience never relates the Palestinians, and the only moment she shows pain and regret – and indeed she cries – is for the Israeli victims of Hanni's acts of retribution. She can only relate to Israeli grief, which again hinders the representation of Palestinians as grievable.

The ultimate confirmation of Israel's use of unrestrained power against Palestinians occurs in the tenth episode. While the Israeli team attempts to escape from Gaza back into Israel proper, the Israeli military plans to mobilize its air-force in order to clear the area for the operation. This is the order that Hilla gives, starting at minute 21: "If you need to take out houses with people inside, kindergartens, schools, do everything that is necessary to clear the area for them." Here, it is unequivocally clear that the situation does not comply with international law, for the order almost brazenly does not accord with the principle of *proportionality*. As a Jew and an Israeli, I admit that this sentence disturbs me. I won-

der how the editors of Netflix reacted to it when this episode was broadcast worldwide.

I maintain that the characters of both Hilla and Dana are not intended to challenge the Israeli viewer (I reserve judgement with regard to the reactions of American or European viewers). They are both beautiful, strong and assertive women whose specific brand of Israeli feminism accentuated by militarism is a source of national pride which should stand in stark contrast to the conservative environment of the Arab world.[12] I believe however, that this sharp shift in the paradigm, indeed in the entire ethos, is also the outcome of a deliberate confrontation with truth. Fauda exposes the brutal reality of Jewish sovereignty in the Middle East and eschews the apologetic (and latently islamophobic) depiction of Jews as compassionate beings who choose to go to war only when their survival is at stake.[13] In that, I argue that *Fauda* represents nothing less than a palpable shift in Israeli ethos of justification.[14]

The Jew as European, the Warrior as Victim: *Prisoners of War*

The view of Jewish warfare as invariably and quintessentially a defensive reaction is embedded in the representation of the Jewish warrior as a vulnerable victim rather than an active agent (like the warriors in *Fauda*). After suffering violence at the hands of their enemies during

their seventeen years in captivity, the three protagonists of *POW* return to their homeland and their vulnerability is exposed in their re-encounter with the order of civilian and domestic life and in particular the three women who await them: the two forceful wives of Nimrod (Yoram Toledano) and Uri (Ishai Golan), and the younger, fragile and traumatized sister of Amiel Ben Horin (Asi Cohen). Ben-Horin (whose name means "son of freedom") was presumed dead in the first season where he returns only in his sister's imagination. The English title of the series is misleading. The Hebrew *Hatufim*, does not refer to political imprisonment as the consequence of warfare between sovereign entities, but rather to the helplessness, lack of agency and female fragility of being an abductee. The Israeli perspective of the conflict with its neighbors emphasizes the fear of being infiltrated and abducted for bargaining purposes, whereas the Palestinians are always numbered in the thousands and referred to as an anonymous sum of "prisoners." The English title therefore subverts Israeli discourse according to which Palestinians are the "prisoners of war" of a legitimate state, whereas Israeli soldiers are always "abductees" that suggests more emphatically than "captivity" the illegitimate status of the outlaw (Lapidot 2014, 157).

And indeed, I contend that *POW* is one of Israel's most explicit representations of tormented perpetrators who perceive themselves as vulnerable and victimized. [15] Ex-

amining *POW* in retrospect in the light of *Fauda*'s success reveals, I believe, a paradigmatic shift in the readiness of Israelis to see themselves not only as victims but as perpetrators as well. I was not able to calculate precisely the number of scenes in *POW* in which characters are shown crying and weeping, but I suggest that this number is unprecedented in Israeli television and film. Furthermore, the first season which was devoted entirely to the psychological drama generated by the inherent tension between family and state, contains many scenes of uncontrolled crying by all three of the protagonists: Amiel's emotionally damaged sister Yael (Adi Ezroni) who is unable to confront the reality of his death; Nimrod, the tougher of the two warriors who also suffers violent PTSD attacks; and in particular the introverted Uri whose fragility resembles that of Gilad Shalit.

Because of Israel's reluctance to acknowledge ethnicity beyond the poles of the Jewish-Arab axis, it is difficult to evaluate the characters' ethnical performance. Nevertheless, highlighting the modern and the European in the characterization of the Israelis in *POW* eliminates any doubts regarding their ethnicity. In her study of the wide currency of Israeli art and television in the world during the last decades, Lee Weinberg examines the manner in which the Israeli "New Jew," secular and European, confronts the country's multi-ethnic changes. She points to *POW*'s totally European or North American production style, where characters conform in appearance and behavior to the norms of "white masculinity," even ap-

pearing foreign in the Israeli landscape (Weinberg 2016, 122). This norm is established right from the outset with the depiction of Israel's prime minister as a blond woman, echoing Angela Merkel's election to the position of leader of the free world and Hillary Clinton's office as Secretary of State, and conforming with Zionism's avant-garde championing of women leaders such as Golda Meir and Tzipi Livni (who is herself blond and was a candidate for the office during the broadcast of *POW*, but who has faded from the public eye in recent years). Blondness features conspicuously in Israeli politics thanks to Sara Netanyahu, the prime minister's wife and their two fair-haired sons.[16] Mrs. Netanyahu's notorious treatment of the domestic staff in the official residence always revolved around ethnic tensions with her allegedly flaunting her European background over their middle eastern origins.[17]

This partiality for the blond and the Nordic is not confined to the prime minister's realm. Other than Amiel Ben Horin, whose surname denotes Sephardi (but not necessarily Mizrahi, meaning, immigrant) roots, there is not a single character in the series who has Mediterranean features. Amiel's sister has Nordic looks, blue eyes and blond hair, and so do practically all the mothers in the series: the mother of Yinon (Yonatan Uziel), the blue-eyed secret service warrior who was dispatched to locate Amiel in Syria, and Yael and Amiel's own mother as well, are all of European appearance.

The symbol of home in the series is Amiel's childhood home, occupied only by his younger sister who also manages his kennel business. In the first season the empty house is permeated by Amiel's ghost, and after learning of her brother's death Yael decides to sell the house. This prompts many scenes in which cunning Mizrahi-looking real estate agents predict the demolition of the ideal single-family tiled house (roofing relates to Zionism's dissociation from the flat roofs of traditional Arab houses) to give way to the high-rise buildings of the nouveau riche. It is this demise of the dream house of the Zionist colonial imagination that *POW* unabashedly laments.

Nostalgia lies at the heart of the entire series, nurtured by the chasm created by the seventeen lost years in captivity between the present and the memory of a simpler and more innocent past. The Ashkenazi imagination and ideal of the new Jew separates the sane and moral Israel of 1948 and the brazen and avaricious Israel that replaced it after the 1967 war and the beginning of the occupation. This distinction ignores the Nakba, the occupation of Palestine in 1948, which was carried out almost entirely by Ashkenazi warriors such as Yizhar, not to be confused with the brutality of Mizrahim who joined the Israel Defense Forces mainly from 1967 onwards and in large numbers in recent years (unlike the Prime Minister Office, which was appointed so far entirely by Ashkenazim, the IDF has had four Mizrahi chiefs of staff beginning with Shaul Mofaz in 1998).[18]

Of the three abductees, Amiel alone subverts Ashkenazi characterization: Nimrod's surname Klein is typically Ashkenazi, and Uri's surname Zach, although Hebraized, signifies purity and whiteness. One of the most salient motifs in both seasons is the song "*Hofim*" (Shores) written by Nachum Heiman to lyrics by Natan Yonatan and popularized by Chava Albernstein, one of Israel's prominent Ashkenazi singers. It tells of a shore longing for the brook, and the seashells longing for home. The song is sung by Abdullah Ben Raschid (Yousef Sweid), a terrorist who was sent to Syria in exchange for the returnee, and now helps Amiel construct his new identity after his conversion to Islam. Now called "Yussef," Amiel is the leader of the terror group "Children of Jihad" that was responsible for his own abduction, having succeeded its previous leader Jamal (Salim Daw) after his death from cancer. While in captivity, Amiel, displaying classic symptoms of Stockholm syndrome, transferred his allegiance to Jamal who was his patron and mentor during those years. Hearing the song from Abdullah's mouth arouses in Yussef-Amiel a yearning to return home and in fact breaks down the facade of his new identity: singing it alone and in secret, he bursts into tears.

The series contains many subversive elements in its political representation of the conflict between Israel and the Arab world. They exist in the background and are easily missed, but it seems that the boundaries between Israel and Syria are crossed in a way that dismantles

them. The "Children of Jihad" is in fact a Palestinian terror (or resistance) group and, as in *Fauda*, the refugees are not directly mentioned but have a latent resonance. We reveal that Jamal himself, the leader of the group, is a Palestinian Israeli who was drawn almost inadvertently into the resistance, comes only at the end of the second season. The defining visual motif of the series is a picture that hangs both in Israel's North and in Syria, depicting the shoreline of Haifa celebrated by refugees who were able to infiltrate. It is – again, almost invisibly, and unwittingly – the most powerful depiction of the Nakba on the Israeli screen, a depiction of the division of a territory that used to be continuous in *Bilaad al-Sham*.[19] Thus it is possible that the home that is longed for in "Shores" refers to a land outside the Western-Zionist reality and imagination.

When Amiel-Yussef is required to resolve the aporia of his life and identity, he chooses to return to Israel in keeping with his Muslim identity, together with his wife Leila (Hadar Ratzon-Rotem) and their protégé Ismail, Jamal's orphan son. When Leila tells him she cannot abandon her elderly parents and that "this is my people" ("*hada sh'abi*"), he replies that their home – "our home" – is in Israel. Leila chooses to stay behind but he takes Ismail, who is himself a son of a Palestinian Israeli, back to Israel-Palestine with him. Ismail's destiny seems to adhere to the classic orientalist plot, as he is redeemed from an arduous Arab existence and given the chance of a life in the modern and progressive State of Israel.

Homeland: The Pedagogic Confrontation With the Arab

I return now to Carrie Mathieson, to her intriguing living room which reflects the interior of a complex mind, one that encompasses Afro-American jazz as well as hints of militant Islam. The surveillance monitors that invade Sergeant Brody's home as well as Carrie's private space and the manner in which the series relates to Carries' body and mind (Bavan 2015, 149), seem to foreshadow the present period of the corona pandemic and the four walls of a forced quarantine within which this very article was written. Of the three series discussed here, *Homeland* is the one most obviously concerned with the human and psychological aspect, evidenced by its focus on a single heroine and her vast inner world. However, because she possesses full agency (unlike the protagonists of *POW*), she oscillates between the inner emotional or psychological life of the victim and the external action- and plot-based role of the perpetrator (as in *Fauda*).[20] As Lindsay Steenberg and Yvonne Tasker have pointed out, contrary to the conventions of the genre, Carrie is not at all the stoic investigator, but tends instead to cry, swear and burst into fits of anger (Steenberg and Tasker 2015, 129-130).[21] She also hints at a middle way, between the crying of *POW* and the familiarity and militia-like behavior of *Fauda*. As in *Fauda*, she disobeys her superiors without compunction, but contrary to Dana and Hilla, she is morally unimpeachable, at least in the sympathy and humanity she displays towards Muslims.

She rarely uses coercive methods in cross examination, a very prevalent feature in *Fauda* (Ben Yehuda 2020, 11), and in situations when she, unwillingly, has to do so, is evidently tormented by her conscience.

After reading the vast literature on *Homeland*, I believe that the two scenes that drew the attention of most of the critics are its title sequence and Carrie's hospitalization at the end of the first season. As Bevan argues "Carrie's mind and body humanize and literalize the war on terror" (Bevan 2015, 145), and through them government surveillance is made visible (Ibid.). I would further argue that *Homeland* displaces the violence perpetrated against the state's "obvious" targets, which are Muslims, onto the visible violence directed against Carrie and Brody, both separately and together, in a marriage between terrorism and mental illness. *Homeland* thus presents a subtle confrontation with the shooting and crying paradigm that I delineate here. I suggest that the series' participation in the "contemporary habit of writing disability as specialness" (Negra and Lagerwey 2015, 130) enables the outcast to serve as an officer of the law in complete antithesis to the essence of policing. The outcast is not the criminal but the officer. In *Homeland*'s justification of violence, Carrie does not lack agency as do the soldiers of *POW* – she is responsible for and even aware of the implications of her actions – but nonetheless she, like them, is an innocent victim. In David Gramling's reading of *Homeland*, the correspon-

dence between terrorism and mental illness is conflated in Carrie's anti-terrorism activity, where she sometimes breaks the rules (as for example in being treated by her own sister rather than by a state-approved doctor), and when she fails in her performance of normative "sane" behavior, she actually succeeds in her professional investigatory intuitions (Gramling 2016, 107).

I wish to return to the opening of my argument to examine *Homeland*'s relevance to the *NYT*'s ranking of foreign television series. Bearing in mind that the Arab language and Islam reach the arbiters of taste in the acclaimed newspaper exclusively through Israeli productions, it is pertinent in this context to examine *Homeland*'s own performance of Arabness. Given that the theatrical tools of disguise and dissimulation are the essence of the *mista'aravim* system of combat and the bedrock of Fauda's world, it is possible to delineate a parallel cultural-historical aspect to the shifts I describe here. If, in Jamal's words that became a leitmotif in the last episodes of the second season of *POW*, "the thing which makes a man's identity is his deeds," then *Homeland*'s realization of the idea of the "turned" soldier is vague and incomplete because of its reluctance to actually use the Arab language. Apart from Brody reciting the first words of the *Surah al-Fatiha*, the characters of *Homeland* rarely use the language, probably because of the unfeasibility of training the actors in its intricacies. In both Israeli series the conjunction of the West and Islam is patently appar-

ent in the mere proximity between all Semitic peoples, Jews and Muslims alike, who share the Middle East in a de facto co-existence. The crucial point is that while *POW* crosses provisional boundaries, dismantling them in the process, and while *Homeland* relates to a vastly remote culture, *Fauda* does not relate to turning identities or crossing borders because its protagonists are both Jews and Arab-Muslims in the first place, defined by the historical application of the quintessentially middle eastern social term of *mista'aravim*. The concept of "turning" thus has different applications in each series and is particularly pronounced in the American one, although without the core performativity of language.

Those differences are crucial for an understanding of Israel's position between the United States and the Orient, for they also relate to the basic distinction between the psychologically inverted discourse and the performative acting out of trauma characteristic of the thriller genre. Unlike Doron, whose own father was a proud Iraqi Jew and whose mother tongue is consequently Arabic, and unlike the *mista'aravi* soldiers who are always part of the world they politically infiltrate (and hence, do not really infiltrate it culturally!), Carrie is not only the young neurotic western woman a la Ally McBeal, but also a teacher of English to Arab immigrants. In the first episode of the second season, we see Carrie after having left the CIA, standing in a classroom in front of a white board on which many words in Arabic letters are writ-

ten, implying that this English course is intended for Arab-speaking pupils. The series later came under fire for its orientalist approach arising from an incident during the shooting of the fifth season in Berlin. The series' prop and art teams recruited some local refugee street artists to write graffiti in Arabic. The second episode of the season was aired with tags reading, in Arabic, "# Black Lives Matter," "*Homeland* (al Watan) is watermelon," and "This show does not represent the views of the artists" (Ibid., 109-110). [45] The cultural blindness shown here, typical of any privileged position, is overwhelming, exposing the creators' ignorance of the Arabic script of their own creation and their complete lack of interest in discovering its content. But above all, it reveals the absurd cultural positioning of *Homeland* and its Israeli predecessor and successor vis-a-vis the Arab world: the former is alien and distant and the two latter series are almost an integral part of it.

All three series have the same interest in addressing what is perceived as a totally monstrous other: The Muslim resistance terror fighter, and in *Homeland* and *Fauda* this extends to the suicide bomber as well. But if Arabic is itself a conduit for the expression of a traumatic and repressed self, in *Fauda* this is taken to the extreme by the fluency of its Israeli characters and the predominance of Arabic in the series.[22] Hence, although *Homeland* projects a mature subject with agency who is accountable for her actions, it involves what Homi Bhabha articu-

lated as a "pedagogic imperative" which is how national sovereignty consolidates itself through history and the tradition of signifiers that are projected onto the people. Conversely, *Fauda*, albeit without any self-reflexivity, conforms more to what Bhabha dubs the "performative," more suggestive of an incoherent acting-out that destabilizes symbols of national imperatives in the interests of cultural difference. Nonetheless, although Weinberg suggests that *Homeland* discharges the identity crisis depicted in *POW* (P. 123) I still believe that Islam maintains a powerful presence also in *Homeland*, not only in Brody's traumatic acting-out, but also latently in the figure of the Jew, Carrie's mentor Saul, who recites the Jewish requiem (the Kaddish) for all the Muslim and non-Muslim dead in the series. Although doomed to ignorance and the monologism of English, and despite being far less performative than *Fauda* and *POW*, *Homeland* does produce moments that unsettle the "pedagogic." This, however, does not change the fact that the show displaces the object of violence from Islam onto Carrie's tormented body which appeases Islam's subversive political potential while focusing on the dedicated and creative mind of the outcast. In that, it incorporates Islam and terror into the decent Protestant values of mainstream America.

The Next Decade: Postscript

In 2020 Gideon Raff, the principal creator of *POW* and co-creator of *Homeland* embarked on another American production with the Netflix series *The Spy*. This series

tackles a specific Israeli historical and national episode: the recruitment of Eli Cohen, a Jew of Egyptian-Syrian descent, into the ranks of the Shin Beit in order to carry out extensive espionage on the Syrian elite just prior to the 1967 War. This is a twofold and inverse gesture, for Cohen's metamorphosis into Camel Amin al-Tabeth is in fact a return to his origins. Cohen is unarguably an indigenous Arab. Unlike the crew of *Fauda*, he belongs to the first generation of Mizrahi immigrants whose native knowledge of Arabic made them tremendously valuable to the security forces. By casting almost exclusively Israeli or American Jewish actors, Raff's production completely discards the Arabic, French and Hebrew from Cohen's story, subscribing thereby to the orientalist Hollywood approach whereby Israeli actors also portray exotic Middle Eastern Arabs in exclusively English renditions. A further twist is the casting of a British-Jew (Sacha Baron Cohen) in the role of Eli Cohen. Muslims, it seems, will never play Jews, not to mention ordinary white Americans (in *Homeland*, however, there are many Muslim Americans who play Muslim Americans). The pedagogic act in the Netflix production is blatantly obvious when compared with the Israeli Public Broadcaster's production of the same year: a documentary on Cohen, *Lokhem 566* (Combatant 566), in which Arabic and French are richly represented, both audibly in speech and visually in Cohen's many letters and telegrams.

Nonetheless, *The Spy*, like *POW*, contains a strange subversive moment: all the Syrian scenes (which were filmed in Morocco) are colorful, corresponding to the

luxurious and lavish lifestyle that al-Tabeth (now with a fashionable mustache) led in Damascus, while the scenes in Tel Aviv and its surrounding areas (filmed in Hungary) are filtered through various shades of grey. It projects something about the essence not only of the abandoned Arab world but on the state of Israel itself, painful, grey, alienated from the viewer, and East-European. In *Lokhem 566*, Cohen's wife recalls his elation on his return from his long sojourns in Syria, as if this attests to his pride and integrity. Indeed, in his trial – also completely missing from the Netflix plot, in contrast to the documentary which focuses mainly on the trial and its records that reveal much about the Zionist project – Cohen pleaded innocence on the grounds that he was not a traitor but an emissary. The Syrians rejected this plea, and, in the words of the then Syrian president Amin al-Hafiz in his decision to decline a request of pardon: "*hādhā wahidun tahammara alā qawmihi*" (this is an Arab who turned against his own people). Yes, turning always implies two directions and indeed, the limits of one's imagined homeland. Cohen's tormented figure represents a divide that is at the core of Semitism and its colonial tragedy, the shattered homelands – always in plurals – of Jews and of Arabs.

NOTES:

1. I believe it is important to give a voice to a Palestinian critic as well (in this case the author is himself Gazan). Thus, Abusalama's sharp criticism claims: "Not in even one scene do they show any respect for the Palestinian resistance to Israeli apartheid" (Abusalama 2020).

2. It is important to note that the paradigmatic shift I am delineating works indeed in tandem with Netanyahu's extended term of office, but the historical break between Israel's old and allegedly pure, sanctified and naïve past, and its blunt ruthless current approach to its own violence (which might be understood as an almost nihilistic state of repression) can be traced to the globalized political environment that preceded it. In the context of the conflict with the Palestinians, Ehud Barak's administration might serve as a better point for periodization, as it sealed the Israeli narrative declaring that the Palestinians do not seek peace after rejecting Barak's proposals at the Camp David Summit of 2000. Indeed, the many studies I have read refer to the Second Intifada which erupted at that time. This historical discourse is beyond the scope of this study, but may contribute another angle to its argument.

3. The state is the only body permitted to legitimately enact physical violence within a certain territory (Weber 1994, 310-311).

4. I cannot suggest a genealogy of this term, but in Cinema Studies it was prevalent especially with the eighties and the aftermath of the First Lebanon War (which was readdressed

later in the first decade of the new millennium in many anti-militaristic works, such as *Waltz with Bashir*). Ella Shohat's classical study of Israeli Cinema refer many times to the paradigm of "shoot and cry," and points out also to "displacing the political issue onto a psychologized, anthropocentric plane" (Shohat 2010, 235-236). In literature, it was probably David Grossman's novel *To the End of the Land*, which was published the same year Bashir was out, and is perhaps the most important work of this wave which *POW* represents in television. The First Lebanon War and the wave that reflects it at the end of the first decade of the millennia (unlike the second which concerns me here), was also discussed by Yaron Peleg and Yael Munk, but although they focused on anti-militarism, they were less concerned with the Palestinians and the way Israel reckons with its offences. See their contribution to S. Harris, Rachel and Omer-Sherman, Ranen (eds., 2013). *Narratives of Dissent: War in Contemporary Israeli Arts and Culture*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press. A study of the first decade of the millennium in Israeli cinema is Utin (2017), which outlines mainly how many films of that time looked away almost wittingly from any kind of deliberations with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

5. The figure of Christ was and still is a point of reference to the Jewish Revival, from the work of Yiddish writer Shalom Ash, to Aaron Abraham Kabak's Hebrew novel *On the Narrow Path* (1936), to Israeli poetry of the sixties and seventies and right up to Amos Oz's novel *Judas* (2014). See for example Kartun-Bloom, Ruth (2009). *Hirhurim 'al psikhoteologia be-shirat Natan Zach*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad.

6. For the video clip: https://twitter.com/kaneurovision/status/1126743674816270336

7. There are many aspects to this renaissance, but perhaps the two most important examples are Eva Illouz's series of long essays about the Mizrahi struggle in the *Haaretz* weekend supplement, which evoked again the pioneering struggle made by the Democratic-Mizrahi Coalition (*ha-keshet*), and the appointment of Miri (Siboni) Regev as Minister of Culture (ushered in a provocative picture of the minister on the front of the "7 Leilot" weekend magazine of Yediot Aharonot [March 10, 2016], accompanied by three black panthers as a form of reclaiming, or appropriating, the "Black Panthers" movement of the seventies, with the title "A Cultural War? This Is the War of Mizrahi Independence!"). For a survey of this "Mizrahi Decade" see Illias, Ines (2020). "*Eikh mashpi'ah ha-mavaphkha ha-mizrahit shel he-'asor ha-holef 'al ha-hevra ha-yisraelit?*" Haaretz, 16 January.

8. Perhaps the most memorable scene takes place in the first season, when during the violent interrogation of the Sheikh, the troop's woman fighter Nurit (Rona-Li Shimon) breaks down and rushes out weeping, only to be admonished by Avihai (Boaz Conforti), the team's sniper, who reminds her that they are trained to act like dogs and to focus only on their mission.

9. See the work of Uri S. Cohen, discussed in Ben Yehuda, 2020, 12.

10. See again the work of S. Cohen.

11. The classical study of the way lives are rendered grievable according to framing by coverages in the media, was made in Butler (2009). Butler also traces that framing as facilitating the use of violence, that is, initiating death easily in the first place.

12. It is important to note that a different interpretation of Hilla is possible: I contend she is in not a villain, but Doron does leave her after she lies to him and their superiors (all because of her obsession with Hanni). Again, if there is criticism of her character, it is connected more to her ruthless ambition than to her attitude to the population of Gaza, but at the very end of the series a doubtful reading of her conduct is allowed. It is also worth noting that at the end of the third season crying does find its place when Doron and other members of the troop weep after the death of Avihai, their co-combatant. It is nonetheless very marginal when viewed in the totality of *Fauda*'s four seasons. I thank Elad Lapidot of the University of Lille for drawing my attention to this.

13. This approach latently captures an Israeli, and in many respects western view, whereby Muslims themselves do not value their own lives, an attitude encapsulated in Golda Meir's address to the Arabs: "We can forgive you for killing our sons but we will never forgive you for making us kill yours." Today Palestinians continue to be blamed for using civilians and often their own children as "human shields" in order to deter the "moral" army from attacking them. It is remarkable that in the first season of *Fauda*, the Israeli side also partakes in this performance of the "human shield" (Ben Yehuda 2020, 5).

14. Just recently a thorough research was published on the shift I outline here, but from the perspective of the Israeli army, its generals, and habitus. Yagil Levy's thesis inquires the way Israeli society succumbs to what he calls "the militarization paradox," according to which the more a society addresses issues of human rights, the more it also lavishly acknowledges its violence. Like most scholars, Levy's periodization sees in the Second Intifada the beginning of that trend, but at the same time, he also points out to the decisive change between soldiers of that period who were more restrained, and those who, almost twenty years later, were enlisted as snipers in the March of Return (strangely he avoids mentioning the name of the protests) and boasted on their killings (Levy 2023, 235). His analysis also focuses on the ethnic difference between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, and it is worth mentioning his observation of a "bad bereavement," by those who proudly applaud the sacrifice of their children for the homeland (356). In that, he mentions Miriam Peretz who lost two of her sons in battle and became a cultural figure in Israel (and also a candidate in the last presidential elections). Levy does not mention that, but it seems that Peretz was never ever captured crying in Israeli media which makes her indeed the epitome of that change in Israeli culture.

15 Morag does not relate to the series, which adheres to her thesis of the trauma of the perpetrator a historical sense as well, as the series was broadcast right after the huge success of *Waltz with Bashir* which is the paradigmatic case of "trauma of the perpetrator."

16 On his wife's sixtieth birthday (in November 2018), the Prime Minister recounted proudly the meeting they both had

with Pope John Paul the Second who was Polish and mistook Mrs. Netanyahu for one of his people because of her European looks.

17. She was twice convicted by court on charges relating to these incidents, but according to the media coverage she allegedly always flaunts her European manners to her employees, even specifying that she and her family drink milk packed in cartons and not plastic bags which are still commonly used in households in Israel.

18. On the tensions between 1948 and 1967, and how the latter enables the relinquishing of any form of accountability for the former, see Shenhav 2012. See also Ben Yehuda 2018.

19. Such subversive moments are also salient in the American production. It is mesmerizing to see at the beginning of *Homeland*'s second season that the arch-villain Abu-Nazir, who operates from Iraq and is a member of al-Qaida, is in fact a Palestinian refugee (something that is mentioned in passing). See also Gramling's discussion of drone attacks on Gaza in the series Rubicon (2010) in Gramling 2016, 105.

20. For the dismantling of these binaries in the character of Brody as well, see Zanger (2015, 736).

21. See also Negra and Lagerwey 2015, 129-130.

22. On the use of Arabic in *Fauda* see Ben Yehuda 2020, 2, 8.

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Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism Across Occupied Palestine. **Jennifer Lynn Kelly. Durham: Duke University Press, 2023. 323 pages. $104.95 cloth, $28.95 paper, $29.99 eBook.**

Reviewed by Charles Finn

Jennifer Lynn Kelly opens and concludes her 2023 book, *Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism Across Occupied Palestine*, with the "circumscribed invitation" Palestinian guides offer to tourists: 'Welcome to Palestine/Your Work Is Not Here' (p. 252). Kelly, an associate professor of Feminist Studies and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies at UC Santa Cruz, often parrots this invitation to signal what tourism across Palestine is about – the tourist may visit Palestine, but they cannot stay. Accordingly, "solidarity tourists in Palestine/Israel are repeatedly told that their work is not in Palestine but back in their home countries…[solidarity tourism] is, simultaneously, a pedagogical exercise, an anticolonial praxis, an income-generating industry, and a

voyeuristic and exploitative enterprise" (p. 11). *Invited to Witness*, beginning and ending with this invitation, navigates the ambiguous and multiple ways in which tourism exists across the extent of Palestine/Israel.

Methodologically, Kelly utilizes an 'interdisciplinary ethnographic' approach that drew on, "participant observation; interviews with guides, organizers, community members, and tourists; Palestinian cultural and literary production on displacement and return; and archival material activists have compiled in the wake of solidarity delegations to Palestine since the first intifada" (p. 16). Even though Kelly had participated in one hundred solidarity tours herself, she does not solely rely on her own experience. This methodological approach is vital because it articulates how her own experiences with solidarity tourism cannot explain tourism at-large across Palestine/Israel. Kelly's mixed methodological approach, along with her vigorous citational practice that emphasizes the intellectual production of Palestinians themselves (p. 14), provides a guide to how non-Palestinian researchers can conduct research that neither essentializes or erases Palestinian knowledge and experience.

Invited to Witness unfolds over seven chapters and a brief conclusion that span from the first intifada to the present day, and across the spatial entirety of Palestine/Israel. With a focus on Palestinian time and space, Kelly's work reflects Mark Rifkin's (2017) conceptualization of

'temporal sovereignty' against 'settler time', and Brenna Bhandar's (2018) theorizing of the co-production of race and property in colonial contexts. The binding line throughout the chapters is that the main characters are the Palestinian guides leading solidarity tourists across Palestinian space and through Palestinian time. For instance, chapter three travels through time by tying the landscape in the West Bank both to its past and to its potential futures, with the action of planting, harvesting, and destroying olive trees as the key practice guides use to show Zionist narratives of land and how Palestinians work against them (p. 88). The fifth chapter makes one of the key interventions of the entire book by using a spatial approach to interrogate solidarity tours in Israeli spaces built on top of Palestinian ruins. In this chapter, Kelly refuses to spatially divide 'Historic Palestine' from the West Bank and Gaza (p. 139), and articulates that solidarity tour guides in Israeli spaces insist on an end to occupation across the whole of Palestine, not just in the West Bank and Gaza (p. 178). Chapter six focuses on how Palestinians in Gaza use virtual space to connect themselves to the rest of Palestine and international audiences with virtual performances and projects of solidarity tourism (p. 180). In doing so, guides once again refuse the spatial segregation that settler colonialism installs in Palestine/Israel. The first six chapters, taken together, described how solidarity tour guides challenge all of the layers of occupation through time and space, and in doing so, organize an anti-colonial praxis aimed at the decolonization of the whole of Palestine.

The seventh chapter takes up the largest provocation that Kelly offers: why do tourists, despite the numerous ways in which Palestinians have presented their own struggle, need to 'see it to believe it' (p. 214) in Palestine? This idea, that tourists cannot trust Palestinians until they see for themselves, runs throughout the book. Kelly's point here is in specific reference to Said's 'permission to narrate' (p. 215) and Spivak's complication 'can the subaltern speak?' (p. 243). Palestinian guides at once refuse to ask for that permission, but are at the same time set in a relationship with the tourist defined by the epistemic violence that Spivak outlines (p. 243). It is within the tension between narration and extraction that Palestinian guides navigate their audience.

As a US citizen who has participated in solidarity tour delegations in the West Bank, I am interested in Kelly's own position in her research. While she does explain her position as a "settler in two places" and as a person who could move across Palestine with much more freedom than Palestinians themselves (p. 17), more explanation of how her own position informed her research would have been instructive. If the opening and closing invitation of this work is 'Welcome to Palestine/Your work is not here', how did Kelly navigate the fact that her work was very much there? Nonetheless, I do believe that Kelly's methodological approach was useful for performing research from an outsider's perspective that centers the experience and knowledge of Palestinians.

Kelly's book is a welcome addition to the literature on global phenomenon in Palestine, placing tourism within and alongside work on topics such as race (Feldman, 2017), refugees (Allan, 2014), human rights (Allen, 2013), neoliberalism (Haddad, 2017; Rabie, 2021), and settler colonialism (Collins, 2011). Exploring occupation and the possibilities of decolonization through the lens of the tour guide is a novel approach. Solidarity tourism is an undoubtedly global phenomenon and Kelly's approach can provide a framework for how it can be more than a voyeuristic or exploitative enterprise that continues to 'other' colonial subjects. Instead, Kelly presents solidarity tourism as a complex action full of contradictions, but if it centers decolonization, it can contain a liberatory potential.

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