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EDITORS' NOTE

As this issue is published, an uneasy truce has descended on Gaza with hostages and prisoners being released and some semblance of peace returning amid ruins. Yet, in the aftermath of the protracted carnage which has been allowed to devastate Palestine for the last couple of years, there continues to emerge reports of horrible massacres and heart-wrenching experiences of agony, loss and desperation in the face of abominable international institutional incompetence. No one is being held accountable. The idea of justice remains as shattered as Gaza's schools and hospitals. Even if some of the demolished buildings can be rebuilt, countless lives have been pulverised forever by the imperial might of the IDF. More alarmingly, in the middle of all this the POTUS has thundered that USA plans to take over Gaza and turn it into a prosperous mediterranean riviera marked by commercial extravagance and renewal. While similar threats have been issued about Greenland or Panama, given the mental status of the individual in question and the abysmal stupidity which guides a large portion of the American populace, one can never really be sure about what kind of atypical American mayhem is next in store for the battered West Asia.

Of course, enough mayhem is continuing also in our own backyard as Bangladesh plunges into greater so-

cio-political turmoil, following the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government and the establishment of a new interim government led by Nobel Laureate Md. Younus. Bangladesh's condition, over the last one year or so actually embodies the myriad crises which have beset nation-building processes in former colonies across the world. An elected government eventually turned grossly despotic, leading to rampant corruption and unchecked atrocities which fomented public discontent to a severe extent and paved the path for political change. However, the forces that emerged during the course of that political change were less guided by enlightened ideals of democracy and freedom and more by bigoted hatred associated with Jihadi, Islamist fundamentalism. This was evident from the way in which the anger towards Sheikh Hasina soon turned into anger towards the figure of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the redoubtable Bengali leader who was instrumental in ensuring the liberation of Bangladesh and was revered internationally for his role in Bangladesh's struggle for emancipation. Not only has his statues and murals been vandalised, his house has been demolished and various institutions named after him have been changed as well as part of an attempt to erase and rewrite history - a move that uncannily mirrors the renaming of streets, gardens, places associated with Mughals in contemporary India, along with fabrication of syllabi to propound unscientific, vainglorious untruths about Ancient and Medieval India. In the prophetic words of Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*,

the looking glass border once brought into being the Radcliffe Line has once again showed how the supposedly separated countries of India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh remain inescapably entangled in reciprocal fundamentalist violence, both epistemological and physical. Naturally therefore, Bangladesh is now debating whether Rabindranath's song should remain its national anthem and liberal thinkers like even Lalan Shah Fakir are being staunchly opposed by fundamentalist organisations of one kind or another.

Perhaps it is the amalgamation of these circumstances which have made the significance of literature and culture all the more urgent in today's day and world which must continue to wage an ideological war against the rhetoric of hatred, division, xenophobia and marginalisation that is raging like wildfire across the subcontinent and beyond. No wonder then that Islamists are attacking bookstall in Bangladesh featuring the publications of Taslima Nasreen and assaulting the publisher while in India, in Uttarakhand the Sangh Parivar has conspired to cancel a book fair because apparently they were wary of the supposed propagation of communist literature and the ideals of Gandhi and Nehru. This enforced cancellation is actually indicative of the power of the spoken and written word and megalomaniac bigots across the world have continued to fear artists and authors for precisely these reason. This is why Christian bigots have banned books ranging from Harry Potter to *The Catcher*

in the Rye, Khomeini imposed the Fatwa against Rushdie and Hadi Matar attempted to assassinate him by assaulting him with a knife which ended up blinding one of his eyes. But just as Rushdie fought back, first with *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and then with his memoir *Knife*, artists and conscientious liberal peace-loving people across the world must also stand up for the values they believe in and fight as loudly as possible for as long as needed.

One voice which constantly stood for such amity and harmony was the voice of Bengali singer Pratul Mukhopadhyay who sadly passed away this year. In his famous song "Ami banglaay gaan gai" (I sing in Bengali) this smooth flow of the local and global manifested itself melodiously in the following lines: "Ami banglaay bhalobasi/Ami banglake bhalobasi/Ami tar haat dhore sara prithibir manusher kachhhe ashi" (I love in Bengali/Bengali, I love/It is through Bengali that I come close to the people of the world). This simple yet profound humanist logic is essential for a planetary humanism which contrasts the strident vitriol of essentialist identities and the threats of unbelonging that they engender. It is this issue of belonging and unbelonging which is explored in this issue of the journal. Please read and keep helping us in our march towards undiscovered homes of amity and plenty.

Arab Life Matters: Gaza Genocide and Political Dissent among Arab Diasporas in the West

Jihan Zakarriya

Religionized Apartheid, Fake Knowledge and Disproportionate Death Tolls During Gaza Genocide

The Gulf War left some Arabs feeling proud that Saddam Hussein has attacked Israel and stood up to the West. It also left many feeling humiliated and resentful of the West's military presence in the Persian Gulf, the West's overwhelming military dominance, and their apparent inability to shape their own destiny. ... Some openings in Arab political systems have already occurred. The principal beneficiaries of these openings have been Islamist movements. In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces. (Huntington 1996, p. 32)

In his well-known book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington argues that in the post-cold war new world 'the great divisions among mankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural' and that 'the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations' (p. 22). Huntington defines a civilization as 'the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes humans from other species' (p. 24). According to the above-mentioned quotation from *The Clash of Civilizations*, Islamic civilization is the new enemy of the Western civilization. Huntington argues that the conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1,300 years. Even though Huntington identifies major seven or eight civilizations of Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilization (p. 29), Islamic civilization stood out as the most dangerous, with its different values and Islamist fundamentalists. Huntington not only inconsistently compares Islamic civilization with Western, when it should be Islamic versus Christian, or Eastern versus Western, but also complacently deters from describing American-led wars in the Middle East as colonial, and imperialist. He intentionally dismisses the fact that the Ottoman empire, like the British Empire, or the French Empire, or the American empire, are political imperialist projects that use religions or specific ideologies such as democracy as war propaganda.

Huntington's vision of the current world order and civilizational conflicts seems consistent with western politics and neocolonialism, and their eurocentric, Islamophobic and biased attitudes towards the Others, particularly Muslim others. American and western missions, and interferences in the Middle East are neocolonial wars meant to control oil, and resources in these countries, and to expand American hegemony. Populations in Muslim and Arab countries are resentful of the West's military presence in their region because of the huge human cost, damage, economic corruption, and political chaos and autocracy that resulted from what Huntington calls western *democratizing wars*. Western and American authorities have been allies and supporters of autocratic Arab rulers and their police states that systematically weaken and target opposition parties, and civilian dissent, but also, they disregard human rights in their wars in the Middle East. For example, during the Gulf War in 1991, Iraqi land, and infrastructure, including water plants and hospitals, were intentionally destroyed by the coalition forces led by American forces. Iraqi people, particularly women and children were starved, displaced, and killed. In 2003, Anglo-American forces killed about two million Iraqi civilians under the pretext of building democracy. Despite the huge global demonstrations against the American invasion of Iraq, and the reliable reports that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction, America pursued its colonialist, destructive plan in Iraq that has been experiencing a civil war, insta-

bility and violence since 2003 to the present. America repeated its militarist invasions in Afghanistan with thousands of afghani civilians killed, and displaced, when Taliban fundamentalists resealed power in the country after 20 years of American rule. During the Syrian civil war (2012-2014), Syrian civilians and their land became a playground for experimenting with American and Russians weapons. Western and specifically American authorities weaponized Islamist groups to fight regimes in Syria and Iraq, as they did before with Bin Laden in his fight against Russians (Arnove 2003; Davis 2005; Dawisha 2009; Crawford 2015).

Furthermore, Huntington asserted that 'civilizations are dynamic, they rise and fall, they divide and merge and disappear' (p. 25). The Islamic empire or civilization fell centuries ago. Islamic states now are divided, and weak. So, why is the Islamic civilization a potential enemy to the west? The current Israeli war in Palestine and Lebanon can provide an answer. Huntington excludes the Jewish civilization symbolized in the state of Israel, and integrates it with western civilization, even though Israel is based in the Middle East. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues convincingly that 'one specifically American contribution to the discourse of empire is the specialized jargon of policy expertise' (p. xvi). For Said, there is a repeated pattern and an internal consistency of Orientalism as a system of knowledge and its ideas about the Orient or the East as career despite or beyond any

correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. Spreading distorted, politicized and biased knowledge based on preconceptions, and stereotypes of others has been a crucial tool of western imperial expansion. Said mentioned how bookstores in the US were filled with 'shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples' (p. xvi). World, and American media, such as CNNs and Foxs, websites, huge numbers of evangelical and right-wing radio hosts, innumerable tabloids and middle-brow journalists reuse and re-cycle the same unverifiable knowledge and vast generalizations to motivate America against the foreign enemies, and terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan, and different parts of the Middle East.

Fake knowledge and false propaganda have been systematic tools of all imperialist projects, including the current Israeli Zionist imperialist project in Palestine and the Middle East. Before and during the 1948-ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, Israelis and their western supporters claimed that Palestine is a land without a people, for a people without a land. In 1917, 96 % of Palestinian Arabs lived in Palestine, and 4 % were Jewish, but Balfour Declaration promised Jews the land of Palestine. The Zionist project was propagated as a redemption of the Western burden of the holocaust and western abuses against Jews. The Jewish diaspora was an essen-

tial component of the state of Israel. The new Jewish immigrants from Europe who were seen as a formerly oppressed minority became the majority. The state of Israel is also the state of Jewish people which 'consists not only of the people residing in Israel but also of the Jews in the Diaspora' (Chomsky, 1999, p. 282). The politics of Jewish diaspora is exceptional in the modern human history. Jews in the west actively support Israel as a substitute home. Jewish diaspora is, however, sustained by afflicting mass murders, like the Deir Yassin massacre, pain and trauma on millions of Palestinians whose diaspora is still unaccommodated. In 1967, Arabs lost more land to Israel that colonized Sinai, Golan heights, West Bank, and Gaza Strip. The USA's global hegemony, and its political economy in the Middle East perfectly harmonize with Israel's colonial project in the region. The USA-sponsored peace agreements between Israel and Egypt after the 1973 war, and then between Israel and Jordan, have changed the Arab-Israeli conflict. Through the Oslo accord (1993), Palestinians acknowledged the legitimacy of the state of Israel, even when Israelis refused the two-state solution.

Present Absentees: Palestinian Bodies are never Counted and Palestinian Diaspora never Ends

Palestinians are referred to as 'present absentees.' In all Arab countries, except for Jordan, Palestinians are given special cards identifying them as 'Palestinian refugees' and in all host countries, they are always aliens (Said 1993; Guergues 2024). The complete forgetfulness of

the rights of the Palestinian diasporas, and refugees who have been fighting for the right of return since 1948 severely contradicts not only with the advantaged position of Jewish diasporas, and the global celebration of their suffering, but also with the current Ukrainian diaspora that, unlike the Palestinian resistance and diaspora, is celebrated and supported by the west in their fight against Russian aggression. The current wars in Ukraine and the occupied territories of Palestine can be seen, then, as outcomes of global political fundamentalist structures that divide the world across antagonistic, prejudiced and imperialist lines. The democratic, civilized US, Europe, Israel and Ukraine versus the autocratic Russia, China, the Middle East and third world countries. In practicing their democracy, however, the western political elites undignifiedly show their hypocrisy, racism and double standards. When Ukrainians sought the right to join the NATO, that is against Russian national security, they received all political, military, and sociocultural support from European and American authorities and populations, yet the Palestinian genocide was totally ignored. Not only are international legal structures and human rights organizations undermined but the basic rights of freedom of speech and criticism are repressed as well. Israeli propaganda dominates, while opposite opinions and anti-genocide thinkers and activists are attacked and marginalized in media. Antisemitism becomes a ready accusation to silence any form of political or human criticism of Israel. Russia faced harsh economic and po-

litical sanctions, but nothing is done when Israeli ambassador shreds the UN charter. Israeli officials humiliate and attack the UN secretary general Antonio Guterres, kill UNRWA workers, and Israel disrespects all humanitarian laws and commits war crimes by mass murdering civilians, and blocking food, medicine, fuel, and tents from entering Gaza, while western and Arab countries remain silent.

In 1998, Noam Chomsky warned that Israel is emerging as “Judeo-Nazi” and “neo Nazi” state which wants “to kill as many Arabs as necessary, to deport them, to expel, to burn them, to make [them] hated by all, to make the ground unstable beneath the feet of the Jews in the Diaspora so that they shall be forced to rush here crying” (p. 753). In September 2023, Netanyahu delivered a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York during which he presented a map of ‘The New Middle East’ without Palestine. When Israel was normalizing relations with an increasing number of Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, and claimed that the Abraham Accords will achieve peace in the region, Israeli extremist leadership under Netanyahu, his government and the Likud party have been fundamentalizing Israelis with ultra-nationalist Zionist dream of building the Greater Israel which will include Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, part of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Sinia in Egypt (MEE 2023; Abdo 2024; Bulut 2024). Palestinians exist inside Palestine, in exile and in camps across Arab countries. The

whole world has witnessed massacres against Palestinians refugees in Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon, have seen the unarmed Palestinians in the occupied territories revolt against Israeli armed oppression, and its apartheid system of the 500 check points in Gaza and the West Bank Barrier. Peaceful objections during the first intifada (1987-1993), and the second intifada (2000), were met with Israeli bullets and international disregard.

The shameful, weak Arab stance, and their abandonment of Palestinians to be manipulated by Iranians, and the fundamentalist attitudes expressed by Netanyahu and his strident ministers, and their extremist supporters left Palestinian resistance movements with very limited options. They needed to fight for their land, and for the recognition of their denied rights. The Israeli war propaganda and its circulation of fake news after Hamas attack on the 7 October 2023 can be seen as the perfect incarnation of American-western uses of Islamophobia as a tool of chaos and colonialism in the region. It also signifies a historic turn in Israel's imperialist project, in American internal social security narratives and in international power relations. Hamas declared that the 7 October attack was meant to take Israeli hostages to exchange them with imprisoned Palestinians, including women and children. Hamas also claimed that the violent interference of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) by activating the Hannibal Directive during the attack led to the huge numbers of civilian victims (Smith 2024; Yaniv

2024). Even though Hamas committed a huge mistake by killing civilians and taking civilian hostages during the 7 October attack, Israel seized the golden chance to speed its imperialist project of Greater Israel. With its international immunity, relations and lobbies, Israel employed international media to victimize itself. Israeli authorities claimed that 1,139 people were killed and about 250 were taken hostages during the 7 October attack. Hamas fighters were accused of abhorrent behaviour of raping women and beheading children which were denied by Hamas. When no single evidence was provided of beheaded children (only two children died during 7 October Hamas attack. One child with a bullet, and the other died in hospital), Israeli and western media still circulated this fake information to dehumanize Palestinians (Chance, et al. 2023).

Female bodies and sexuality are essential parts of war and imperialist propaganda. Americans launched the Afghani and Iraqi wars to save women in the two countries from oppressive dictators and Islamists. In this sense, Israel is no exception. In June 2024, the UN released an in-depth investigative report which found that both Hamas and Israel had committed sexual violence and intentionally attacked civilians (p. 1). Yet, the report reveals that Israeli authorities obstructed the investigations and that the commission was unable to verify testimony of rape, could not get access to witnesses and crime scenes, and found no evidence that Hamas fighters inflicted or

were ordered to commit sexual violence. It also found some Israeli allegations to be contradictory, or false (UN Committee 2024). Likewise, other detailed investigative reports produced by highly respected institutions concluded that Israel's claims about sexual assaults did not stand up to scrutiny, and that alleged confessions of sexual violence were likely extracted under torture, and should not be accepted as credible evidence, and should not be published (UN Committee 2024; Robertson 2024; Graham-Harrison, et al. 2024; MEE 2024; Borger 2024; Human Rights Watch 2024; Amnesty International 2024; Physicians for Human Rights Israel 2024). Setting the media scene for its planned genocide, Israeli leadership employed typical imperialist stereotypes, and racist, Islamophobic narratives. Israel declared war on Hamas fighters who were described as 'terrorists' and are compared to 'Nazis', and 'ISIS'. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was adamant to employ figurative and religious language to demonize and dehumanize Hamas: 'Hamas is ISIS. And we will defeat it just like the enlightened world defeated ISIS. This vile enemy wanted war, and it will get war' (Tharoor 2023; Reutersa 2023). Figurative religious language reminiscent of the Christian civilizing colonial missions was systematically used to falsify international public consciousness and to convince the dominantly white 'civilized' West that Israel's war with Hamas is an existential war against 'forces of darkness' and 'animalism', with Israel and the 'civilized' world characterized as 'forces of light' and 'humanity'. American, and

European political leaders and Zionist-oriented media echo Netanyahu's hate speech and support his collective punishment of Gazans by repeatedly stating that 'Israel has the right to defend itself.' Hamas fighters disappeared in tunnels, and Palestinian civilians were targeted.

In its battles against Hamas, Israel killed more than 43,600 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, and the majority of them were women and children. About 15,000 Palestinians are missing under the rubble (Saric 2024; Graham-Harrison 2024; Batrawy 2024). Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins focuses on the indirect deaths in Gaza and the West Bank that are equally shocking and appalling. Stamatopoulou-Robbins indicates that estimated deaths from Starvation are 62,413, and estimated deaths from lack of access to care for chronic diseases are 5,000. There is no data on estimated deaths from infectious diseases, maternal/neonatal and others (2024, p. 3-4). The disproportionate death toll between Israeli and Palestinian casualties is indicative of a repeated modern history of western colonialism where Arab and Muslim lives do not matter. French colonizers killed about a million and half Algerian, Italians raped and killed thousands of Libyan women, and men, and the American atrocities in the Abu Gharib prison speak of a sustained Western pattern of racism and colonial atrocities. As pictures, confirmed reports and videos documenting Israeli atrocities, and war crimes in Gaza including starving of civilians, attacking hospitals, destroying infrastructure,

and sexual violations and torture of Palestinian prisoners are dismissed in an unprecedented way, Israeli imperialism insidiously and insolently employed parts of the Talmud to religionize and justify their atrocities (Middle East Eye 2024; Litvin 2023). Even as on 21 November 2024, the International Court of Justice issued an arrest warrant against Netanyahu and Galant for committing war crimes in occupied Palestine, on 28 November 2024, the Vice-President of the European Commission, Joseph Borel asked Israeli people to fight ‘mental colonization’ and to work for peace. The genocide in Gaza and the displacement of about two million Shias in Lebanon are totally excused by the USA as Israel has the right to defend itself. The USA, Hungary and other European governments defended Israel, and Netanyahu. Israel is now seizing Arab lands in Syria, Gorden, Palestine and Lebanon. Do Israel’s immunity and absolute domination initiate the age of Jewish imperialism administered by religious and political fundamentalists like Netanyahu and Trump? Or will it signify the end of the current world order of western double standards and racism towards other civilizations?

Is it Really the Israeli Lobby?

American political scientists John Mearsheimer and Jeffrey Sacks criticize American complicity with the current Israeli genocide in Gaza. Mearsheimer argues that the first Gulf War (1990-91) revealed that Israel was becoming ‘a strategic burden’ and that ‘saying that Israel and

the United States are united by a shared terrorist threat has the causal relationship backwards. Rather, the United States has a terrorism problem in good part because it is so closely allied with Israel, not the other way around' (2007, p. 32). For Mearsheimer, "genocide is a red line", and American, British and German support of Israel's war crimes is specifically "unexplainable" (Mearsheimer 2024). Sacks regards Netanyahu as 'the most dangerous man in the world,' and confirms that 'the war in Gaza could end today if the United States stopped supplying weapons to Israel' (2024). According to Sacks, Netanyahu is the mastermind and cheerleader behind the American wars on Saddam in Iraq, and Al Asad in Syria. Netanyahu also encouraged American military support of Ethiopian to invade Somalia. For Sacks, the Zionist lobby undermines American democracy, and international credibility (2024). After 'the war on terror,' different American administrations develop a misleading concept of security that shows social and national securities in Israel and America as intertwined. The Israeli lobbies in the USA, and many western states, make a significant effort to bend U.S. foreign policy to support, and advance Israel's political interests. Their activities include voting for pro-Israel candidates, funding pro-Israel organizations, and settlements plans, and controlling media outlets. AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations are famous Zionist lobbies in the Usa that are run by fundamentalists and hardliners and openly support the Likud party's colonial expansions (Seth 1982; Chomsky 1999; Mearsheimer and Walt

2022). The conflict between the west and the Arabs is a political, and anticolonial conflict. The declared reasons behind the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center were political including sanctions on Iraq, the unconditional western support of Israeli occupation of Palestine and Southern Lebanon, western support of massacres against Muslims in Somalia, India, and Chechnya, and the strong presence of American troops in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia (Bin Laden 2002). Islamists and terrorists are not only against the west but are also against the majorities of Muslims. They killed civilians in Egypt, Syria, Sudan and all Arab countries to seize power. Their projects of building Islamic States are political projects. Their cultural agenda of Islamizing Arab societies is mainly a political propaganda. The following part of the paper examines political dissent among Arab and Muslim diaspora communities in the West as a form of anti-colonial activism, and anti-political fundamentalism in the west.

Diversity, Citizenship and Freedom of Speech in the Postcolonial, securitized West

Since October 2023, the Palestinian cause became the centre of attention worldwide, particularly in the west. Public spaces, civil organizations and university campuses across the world have become sites of growing protests and activities in support of Palestinians' struggle for the recognition of their rights and the liberation of

their country. Arab and Muslim diaspora communities, western populations, and activists with different backgrounds have gathered and mobilized to object against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Israeli illegal settlement, the displacement of Palestinians in the occupied territories, and unconditional western military and political support to the apartheid state of Israel, and its genocide in Gaza. Students' movements in the US and Europe launched campaigns to boycott Israeli academic institutions, and to stop investments and businesses in Israel. The global solidarity with Palestinians amid increasing police violence against protesters, particularly minority protesters, and the persistent silencing of freedom of speech in western academia, media, and the public spaces raise serious questions concerning the social security, freedom and politics of coexistence in the cosmopolitan west (Civic Space Report 2024; Saber 2024; Chamas 2023; Bazail-Eimil 2023). By examining political dissent among Muslim diaspora and immigrant communities in western countries from a postcolonial perspective, the paper argues that the concept of diaspora is a political construct. Diaspora can be used by immigrants, the exiled, the displaced, the marginalized as well as those categorized as original natives. In this sense, diaspora not only signifies a spatial disparity between the place where immigrants, for example, live and their homeland, but also denotes cultural, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, historical loss of or parting from or aspiration towards specific values, socioeconomic po-

sitions, powers. Edward Said explains that:

I have felt that most of the alarmist and deeply flawed discussions of Islamic fundamentalism in the West have been intellectually invidious precisely because they have not been compared with Jewish or Christian fundamentalism, both equally prevalent and reprehensible in my own experience of the Middle East. What is usually thought of as a simple issue of judgment against an approved enemy, in double or exile perspective impels a Western intellectual to see a much wider picture, with the requirement now of taking a position as a secularist (or not) on all theocratic tendencies, not just against the conventionally designated ones. (1994 44-5)

Said's double nationality as a Palestinian American enabled him to use his marginal position to 'speak truth to power'. He criticized the double standards in the developed secular world, the political uses of Islam, and Islamophobic ideas in western academia and media, and the construction of "objective truth of the white man's superiority built and maintained by the classical European colonial empires" (p. 22). For Said, the public realm in the multiethnic west is very complex and it is difficult to develop a concept of justice and fairness that "allows for differences between nations and individuals, without at the same time assigning them to hidden hierarchies, preferences, evaluations" (p. 22). Said believed that Islamic, Jewish, and Christian fundamentalisms ex-

ist. The widespread racist, Islamophobic narratives and the dauntless attempts to justify the Gaza genocide by adopting the Israeli story as 'objective truth' compel Arab and Muslim diasporas worldwide to identify with the recurrent othering, enimization and dehumanization of Palestinians and Arabs as terrorists worthy of mass murder and collective punishment. Thousands of Arabs and Muslims living in the west therefore took to the streets to democratically and freely object to the clear political bias and double standards towards Palestinians.

The obvious multiethnic diversity of participants in pro-Palestine protests, and their direct engagement with political decisions in their host western states shocked authorities and decision-makers and disturbed deep-seated power hierarchies in many western countries. Redisciplining these unsettled marginalized minorities and restoring hierarchical orders that define separating lines between genders, classes, ethnicities, and religions become the main duties of western authorities, their police, and the racist groups in these countries. For instance, after 7 October attack, the power, and immunity of the Israeli lobby in America is shown, and Netanyahu is welcomed in the Capitol, when 'US Islamophobia stands out for its enormity' (Mansoor 2024). Arabs, and Muslims in US receive comments to 'go back where you came from,' recalling the widespread global fear and hate crimes that followed 9/11. The Palestinian flag is cut, and removed, students and university staff are arrested

and lose their positions for supporting Palestinian people (Mansoor 2024; Cineas 2023; Salam 2023; Wendling 2023; Human Rights Watch 2024).

Given Israel's contemporary colonial expansion in the Middle East, and their atrocities against Arabs, are Israel and the USA at all democratic when Netanyahu and Trump are accused of corruption and openly utter excluding sexist, racist and fundamentalist opinions? Huntington's ideas on clashes between Islamic and western cultures and civilizations are also perfectly relevant for an understanding of the international and internal divisions regarding the Gaza war, and the political power of Netanyahu and Trump. Huntington states that 'in the politics of civilizations, the peoples and governments of non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonialism but join the West as movers and shakers of history' (p. 23). When Huntington points to the heterogenous nature of modern western societies, he hypothesizes that 'as people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an 'us' versus 'them' relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion' (p. 29). Consequently, civilizational cultural differences are the main reasons behind the fact that 'in Italy, France, and Germany, racism is increasingly open, and political reactions and violence against Arab and Turkish migrants have become more intense and more widespread since 1990' (p. 32). When western countries

benefit from big waves of immigrants from the Middle East, South America, Asia and other parts of the world, and use, and sometimes, exploit them within their economic plans, western authorities and their deep states and circles of power still maintain and disseminate an imperialist culture of hierarchy, *white* racial superiority and western security. Antagonism and racism against immigrants, particularly Muslims who stand for the Islamic civilization, are growing in western countries not because of cultural conflicts as Huntington claims but are due to the widespread political fundamentalisms and populisms.

Huntington essentializes and homogenizes concepts of civilization and identity, ignoring the diversities, and multiplicity of visions within the Islamic and Western civilizations. For example, Islamic countries have different interpretations of Islamic cultural and theological heritages. Likewise, Huntington's argument that conflict will rise because people tend to identify with their ethnicity and religion is controversial. It hints at the conclusion that immigrants, and minorities in America, for example, will never feel integrated, or belong to the American nation, and hence will never feel equal to the natives because they have different values, or religions and consequently will always disagree on policies, human rights, trade and laws. In this sense, western multiethnic, and multicultural communities are made more and more conscious of their original backgrounds, their in-

digenous cultures and their different religions since ‘the European community rests on the shared foundation of European culture and Western Christianity’ (p. 27). Trump uses the same narrative of protecting Western Christianity against enemies. For Trump to ‘make America great again,’ he attacks vulnerable groups such as immigrants. Immediately after winning the presidential election in 2016, violent racist attacks and hate crimes spread in American states against American minorities. Muslims and Arabs, particularly veiled women, were systematically targeted. Arab refugees were prevented from entering the USA (Lajevardi, and Oskooii, 2018; Calfano 2017). Similar fears are on the rise again.

Europe: Why mainly Targeting Arab and Muslim Immigrants and Refugees

During the pro-Brexit propaganda in the UK, like Trump’s election propaganda, poor and lower classes, whether white or nonwhite, imagined a community of pure English people devoid of immigrants, including Europeans, as indicative of social and economic stability and affluence. Eight years after Brexit, British people’s living standards are declining, benefits are being cut, and funding to services is slashed. The British government failed to deal with many urgent economic issues and social tensions but provided Israel with financial and military support. The huge and visible pro-Palestine protests in the UK provoked huge anger towards

Arabs, Muslims, and immigrants in general who chose to exercise their political opinions and to defend their rights of freedom of expression. In July 2024, three girls aged between six and nine were killed at a Taylor Swift-themed dance event for children in the town Southport, England. The attacker was a British-born teenager, but immediately after the incident, fake news spread that the attacker was an Islamist immigrant or asylum seeker. Unprecedented, highly organized, extensive anti-Muslims and anti-immigrants demonstrations spread all over the UK, where mosques and stores owned by Muslims were attacked, violent clashes with Muslims, refugees and non-white people were random and Islamophobic and racist comments dominated social media and were re-used by politicians like Suella Braverman, Nigal Farage, and Robert Jenrick. Anti-Muslims and anti-immigrants in the UK uttered that they want 'their Christian culture again'. The vocality, and visuality of Islamophobic hate in the UK provoke fear and terror among Arab diasporas and immigrants who question their belonging, and identity as citizens in the UK (Abdulla 2024; Pietromar-chi 2024.).

It is quite obvious for first generation migrants to feel diasporic or to miss their homeland where they formed memories and have real ties. However, for second and third generations of immigrants to feel diasporic, and a sense of unbelonging in countries where they are born, and grow up is not justifiable. The fact that the concept

diaspora is indiscriminately and persistently attached to minorities is a political decision to dismiss discussions of serious problems of discriminatory identity politics, socioeconomic inequalities, and political corruption. This is evident in Germany where millions of Arab immigrants feel unstable and insecure as official Islamophobic attitudes are adopted to generalize and villify them as rapists, or terrorists (HRW 2024; Langer 2023; Whittle 2024). In European countries, in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, like in the US, Muslim and Arab diasporas are not only seen as a threat to the cultural homogeneity of the 'original' white natives, and a threat to western identity, or are enemized as defenders of terrorists like Hamas, but also as a threat to what Henry Kissinger called the Westphalian system. Kissinger defines the Westphalian system as 'a multiplicity of political units, none powerful enough to defeat all others, many adhering to contradictory philosophies and internal practices, in search of neutral rules to regulate their conduct and mitigate conflict' (p.3). Kissinger mentions the main advantages of the Westphalian system are that no single claim to truth or universal rule, a balance of power, preference for the practical and ecumenical and distillation of order from multiplicity and restraint (p. 3-4). The rise of pro-Palestine versus pro-Israel protests signifies the emergence of the marginalized in the face of the powerful centres, and exposes the dominance of Jewish, and Christian fundamentalist attitudes in different western contexts. Human rights of equality, justice,

and freedom of speech are challenged. Pro-Palestine protesters expose the hypocrisy of the Westphalian values of multiplicity of opinions, respect of diversities of truths, and objective, practical judgments. Many Muslims and immigrants hold western citizenships, but they are made to feel as outsiders and vulnerable. In this sense, diaspora communities are pushed to live in their separate ghettos. There are legal ramifications as well. Almost all counterterrorism laws indiscriminately target Muslim communities as a threat to national securities of western countries (Choudhury, Fenwick 2011).

Diaspora studies are widely discussed from different perspectives of cultural politics, national consciousness, national identity, civilizational conflicts, myths of homeland, and racialized collectivities (Gilroy 1993; Hall 1994). In *Postcolonial Diasporas*, David Chariandy argues that there is a growing disenchantment with nation-based articulations of postcolonialism due to critical attitudes within feminist, queer, and ethnicity studies, that reexamine concepts of nationalisms, identity, globalization, and diaspora (Chariandy 2016). The Gaza war exposes women in the Middle East and in the West as vulnerable targets of political fundamentalists. Under Trump, women engaged in heated debates on abortion during which traditional, outdated religious and cultural norms, that clearly contradict dominant sexual values in America and the west in general, were used. Different religious texts are selectively used to oppress women and

maintain masculinist superiority over their bodies. Jewish and Christian religious fundamentalists regard the Gaza genocide as a means of achieving religious prophecies. Palestinian women's bodies and their children are specifically sacrificed to reach the goal of Great Israel. About a million Palestinian women are displaced, and 70% of civilians killed in Gaza have been women and children, the Palestinian reproductive force. For long, Palestinian women have been defamed in western and Israeli media as bad mothers of terrorists, and suicide bombers. Famous Jewish rabbis like Eliyahu Mali instructs that the teachings of Halakha, or Jewish laws dictate that vandals in today's war are the children of the previous war whom we kept alive, and in reality, it is the women who produce terrorists, and Israelis should kill 'the future generation (the children of Gaza), and those who produce the future generation (women of Gaza), because there is really no difference. (Shibli 2017; Anadolu 2024; Brettler 2024; Tov 2022). These xenophobic and racist ideas expressed by Jewish rabbis are, however, meaningless if they were not persistently supported by Israeli officials and decision-makers such as Netanyahu, Smotrich and Ben Gvir, Gopstein and others who use the media and call for colonizing Northern Gaza, the annexation of the West Bank, and the building of Great Israel. A recalibration of diaspora studies is therefore required in view of these stark circumstances.

Conclusion:

Amid militarist chaos and the disregard of international laws, Trump's big victory as a dictator can be seen as an attempt to reinforce global order, stability and social security in keeping with colonial hierarchies. The Gaza war exposes Jewish, Muslim and Christian political fundamentalisms as shaping world politics today. Arab protesters in America and in UK, France, Germany and other parts in the west are specifically targeted by police. Fake news is intentionally circulated by western government officials, racist groups and politicized media channels to demonize Muslims and Arabs. Western racists are anxious about their supposedly pure culture being corrupted by minorities, particularly Arabs, thinking that cultural purity brings economic and social equality. Nonetheless, public awareness grows of the fact that billions are spent on weaponizing Ukraine and Israel when common people are struggling with the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, inflation, a global rise of prices of basic goods. Saying so, the paper confirms that colonialist and fundamentalist politics impacted both postcolonial western and colonized countries, albeit at varying degrees and in different forms. The inhuman abuses in Gaza correlate with ongoing socioeconomic, cultural and identity insecurities and fears among Muslims and immigrant communities in the West without any clear solution in sight.

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‘Amra kara? Bastuhara. We are the dispossessed’¹ : climate refugees in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*

Sejal Mahendru

“...no one leaves home until home
is a damp voice in your ear saying
leave, run now, I don't know what I've become”
[“Conversations on Home (at a deportation center)”,
Warsan Shire]

These lines, by the British-Somali poet Warsan Shire, were written after the death of a young Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, whose body washed ashore the Mediterranean coast after his family was denied refuge and stranded at sea. Shire’s poem not only invokes the sufferings of the refugee and reaffirms their humanity (a figure whose representation has historically been dominated with images of indistinguishable masses to create a rhetoric of fear), but also portends a different kind of loss: that of the immutability and disappearance of home itself. This

dispossession emerging out of the disappearance of ecological spaces has become an imminent eventuality at a time when rising sea-levels, increasing droughts, unpredictable and harsher weather-events, as well as toxicity and pollution, are making certain places around the world increasingly uninhabitable. This is especially true for vulnerable communities that rely on the land for subsistence and do not have resources to withstand extreme environmental calamities. Andrew Baldwin has coined the term “Anthropocene mobilities” to emphasize the phenomenon that the environment is “the very material substance through which mobility itself is mediated, experienced, and conceptualized” (Baldwin, 290). This inequality across axes of class, race and national identity leads to restriction and vilification of bodies in motion within and especially between nations, as evidenced through the growing rhetoric against immigration, especially from the Global South to North. The growing wave of racially-charged policies targeting Latino communities in the US, South-Asians in the UK and Canada, and Bangladeshis in India, all point to a collective geopolitical crisis.

As we grapple with this rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric around the world, it is a crucial time to contend with how literature, as a mode of cultural resistance, can provide a discursive counter to this fear-mongering and reinstate the humanity of the migrant. One such writer, who acknowledges the challenges in writing fiction that

appropriately addresses contemporary environmental issues and its effects on public perception, is Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh is one of few contemporary writers who have consciously incorporated environmental issues into most of their writings. His book *The Great Derangement* (2016) is a self-reflexive study of the shortcomings of contemporary fiction, especially the novel, in adequately communicating the climate crisis in the face of rampant misinformation and denial. While Ghosh's literary works deal with climate change in its multivalence, for the purposes of this paper, I examine his handling of climate migration in the novels *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) to explore how this elusive categorization plays out in fiction. Through a reading of the two novels in conjunction with the political realities they represent—both novels deal with refugee crises that have occurred in history: across India-Bangladesh in the 1970s, and from the Middle East to Europe in the 2010s— I wish to explore literature's discursive potential in countering the growing anti-immigration rhetoric of the 21st century.

The staggering scale of climate migration has been widely prophesied in recent years. The International Panel on Climate Change estimates that a total of 200 million people will be displaced due to environmental causes by the year 2050 (Brown, 12), yet the figure of the climate refugee is fraught with misconceptions that pose a unique representational challenge. There is lack of a legal framework that protects the rights of climate

migrants: the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, often considered the rubric for international cases report on refugees does not identify environmental migration², an oversight that was tested in January 2020 when Ioane Teitota, an asylum seeker from Kiribati facing deportation in New Zealand, appealed to the United Nations that the imminent submersion of his island country should be grounds for protecting his status as a climate refugee. Teitota's case and UN's favorable resolution have set a global precedent and brought attention to the reality of climate immigration. However, the absence of any international agreement leaves the future of climate refugees uncertain.

In addition to the lack of legal protection, the undefined contours of climate migration pose a challenge to the literary and artistic works that seek to center anthropogenic climate change and its effects. In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon defines environmental violence as “occurring gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon, 4). Since the conditions that drive climate migration are less tangible than other forms of violence and consequently do not register as violence in public memory, the phenomenon poses a representational challenge in our current technological age where audiences are used to spectacle and immediacy to be spurred into action. The

historian Dipesh Chakraborty further stretches Nixon's idea of slow violence to consider its geological scales. In the essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses", Chakraborty highlights how "anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (Chakraborty, 201) by causing atmospheric and geological changes- such as a sustained increase in global carbon emissions- that will unfold over millennia. Thus, human history, measured on a scale of several thousand years, is now inextricable from geological history which has been measured on a much larger timeline. This conflation not only results in a paradigmatic shift in the way history and time are conceptualized, but it also signals a blind spot in literary renditions of climatological issues, where writers struggle with this problem of merging past, present and future. "Crises of climate change produce anxieties precisely around pasts that we cannot comprehend and futures that we cannot visualize", Chakraborty claims. This sentiment that is echoed in *The Great Derangement*, where Ghosh calls literature's inability to address issues of scale a "cultural and imaginative failure" (*The Great Derangement*, 23). The climate crisis is the uncanny, writes Ghosh, and works of fiction that attempt to represent the vast scope of the Anthropocene are often unceremoniously eschewed from the high-echelons of literary realism into the literary realm of the fantastical, an outdated mode of literary criticism that nevertheless helps the readers dissociate from their own

surroundings. Ghosh's argument that literature needs to embrace the uncanny is echoed by Urusla Kluwick, who considers instances of environmental migration and border-crossing as "moments of eruption" where the effects of climate change become visible and legible in an otherwise nebulous system (Kluwick, 509), making it particularly appealing for contemporary environmental writers.

In this regard, both *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* counter this restrictive view of realism by anchoring their plots around real immigration crises and embedding the climatic uncanny within them. Set in the Sundarbans, the plot of *The Hungry Tide* explores the environmental anxieties that lie at the heart of India's treatment of vulnerable migrants, by juxtaposing two timelines. The novel's narrative is split between the early years of the twenty-first century and the 1970s. The novel's contemporary timeline is narrated through the split points-of-view of Kanai Dutt and Piya Roy, two visitors to the Sundarbans. Kanai is a middle-aged, Delhi-based translator visiting his aunt in Lusibari (a small town on the edges of the Sundarbans mangrove) after the death of his uncle Nirmal, while Piya is an American cetologist born to Bengali immigrants, who has come to the delta to observe the Irrawaddy dolphin. Their paths cross on the train to the Sundarbans where Kanai invites her to his aunt's house with the intention of romantically pursuing her. Over the course of the novel, Kanai acts as a translator for

Piya as she ventures into the riverine islands with Fokir, a fisherman and the son of Kusum, Kanai's childhood friend who was killed in the Marichjhapi massacre.

The novel connects the timelines of the past and present through an epistolary narrative that begins with the posthumous discovery of a journal belonging to Kanai's uncle Nirmal, which details his witnessing of the Indian state's assassination of Bangladeshi refugees during the Marichjhapi massacre of 1979. Nirmal's journal offers the narrative an opportunity at historical recovery and informs Kanai (and by extension, the reader) about the complicity of the Indian state when (after cyclone Bhola rendered parts of the Bangladeshi coast uninhabitable) hundreds of climate refugees crossed the porous mangrove borders into India. Ghosh exposes several layers of environmental injustice and dispossession enacted upon this community. The upper-caste settlers were allotted coastal settlements in West Bengal, enabling not only economic but also environmental rehabilitation. However, this poor community of fisherman and farmers who belonged to a Dalit tribal communities, were forcibly relocated to a refugee settlement in the Dandakaranya region of Madhya Pradesh in central India.

In their book *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil categorize three tiers of ecological communities in India: the Omnivores that have manipulated

nature such as those who live in urban centers which includes the lawmakers; the ecosystem people who subsist off their land and immediate environment such as indigenous tribes and to an extent rural farmers; and ecological refugees who emerge when ecosystem people are dispossessed from their environments due to the actions of the omnivores, such as those displaced due to deforestation or development projects. Guha and Gadgil's analysis can be fittingly applied to the displaced community in *The Hungry Tide*. The refugees refuse to remain in these internment camps and march to Marichjhapi, an uninhabited island in the Sundarbans that the state government had reserved for tiger conservation. The refugees' eventual unlawful settlement in Marichjhapi had as much to do with the paltry conditions of the camps, as it had with the fact that the environmental conditions in the dry, arid region put them at a severe disadvantage as they could not successfully farm or hunt in these areas. This recognition of denial of the habitat that the refugees required to thrive in favor of tiger conservation efforts, reveals yet another way in which social hierarchies determine environmental justice, and complicates the question of environmental migration and refugee rehabilitation in our current global situation. The novel ties its narrative to the historical event of the Marichjhapi massacre through the character of Kusum, a poor girl from the Indian side of the Sundarbans who had to move to the mainland after her father was killed by the tigers. When Kusum hears about the refugee set-

tlers' march she decides to join them to return to her native land. This cross-border solidarity between Kusum and the Bangladeshi refugees further strengthens the arbitrary nature of national borders, as Kusum realizes she has much more in common with them than with the Indian citizens of the mainland: "These were my people", muses Kusum, "We shared the same tongue... the dreams they had were not different from my own. They too had hankered for our tide country mud, they too had longed to watch the tide rise to full flood." (*The Hungry Tide*, 165) Kusum's words invoke the absurdity of the national border between India and Bangladesh, which was created in 1947 after the partition of India and East Pakistan, and turned neighbors and community members into foreigners and adversaries overnight. This dissonance between ecological belonging and national identity is further questioned when Kusum's return to Marichjhapi turns her from a native to a refugee and eventually to an intruder when she, along with the other settlers, refuse to leave the island. Kusum's Indian citizenship and her roots in the Sundarbans are not enough to protect her when the state government blocks off the supply of food and drinking water to the island, and eventually sends in law enforcement to forcibly evacuate the settlers, dead or alive.

The Hungry Tide further reveals how environmental disasters magnify and exacerbate the existing socio-political inequalities. The migrants of Marichjhapi were members

of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh who were doubly marginalized due to their religion and within that, their caste. This discrimination also prompted the move across the border to India when the cyclone submerged parts of the coast. While caste discrimination is legally prohibited in the Indian constitution, the Marichjhapi massacre- carried out by the contemporary state government in West Bengal- is a firm reminder that not only do forms of systemic discrimination result in economic inequalities with the denial of equal opportunities and the propagation of generational wealth, but that these markers of identity also influence one's ability to cross regions and borders.

The Hungry Tide tells the stories of many characters who cross national and international borders, and the legitimacy of these movements is determined by their socio-economic status and the labels those generate. From Kanai, the Delhi-based translator who goes to the Sundarbans on a whim, to Piya, the marine biologist from Oregon who travels to the Sundarbans as an international researcher to study the changing migratory patterns of the Gangetic Irrawady dolphins (another direct result of climate change and warming seas), there are many migrants in the world of the novel. In contrast to these cosmopolitan tourists, the "refugee" Kusum, and her son Fokir, are native to the Sundarbans, having grown up in the unique terrain of the mangrove forest, and intimately familiar with the flora and fauna that are found there. That they are the ones who are relegated to the

status of refugees and subjected to the violence that the term engenders may seem like a cruel twist of fate, but actually reveals both the arbitrariness of national borders, as well as the links between ecological and social injustice.

The Marichjhapi massacre is a strong reminder of the terrible fate that might await more climate refugees as the climate crisis deepens, unless there is a stronger mechanism to protect the humanity of the migrants. The novel is especially relevant in light of the ongoing tensions over the Citizenship Amendment Act in India. The Act, passed in 2019 (this time under the Right-wing central government led by the *Bhartiya Janata Party*), aims to provide asylum to refugees that belong to religious minorities from India's neighboring Muslim-majority Nations, excluding Muslim asylum seekers. Furthermore, the government has launched a National Register of Citizens, which has already been implemented in the Indian state of Assam that borders Bangladesh, and includes a caveat for collecting information on residents whose citizenship cannot be sufficiently proven. These laws are seen by many as an attempt to disenfranchise anyone who does not have sufficient documentation at a time when concerns about climate migration across this border are increasing.

While *The Hungry Tide* complicates the question of environmental rehabilitation of refugees by stressing on the injustice of environmental (and historical) erasure,

Gun Island looks beyond the specificities of localized environments towards what Lucinda Newns, in her essay “The Sea Cannot be Fenced: “Natural” and “Unnatural” Borders in Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island*”, terms a trans-local ecology-

Rather than asserting any essential connection between people and their environment as a way of deconstructing bordering processes, *Gun Island* evokes a mobile or, more specifically, translocal form of ecology that emphasizes connections—human and non-human—between locations with otherwise differing cultures, languages, and positions in the capitalist world system. (Newns, 11)

The concept of translocality rejects the hierarchical relationship between natives and immigrants that bioregionalism prioritizes, and instead emphasizes the shared ecological experiences of communities around the world. Newns argues that while *The Hungry Tide* invokes the refugees’ ties to the land to critique the Indian state’s settler-colonialism, this essentializing impulse can also work to delegitimize the presence of “outsiders” in the face of global climate change and its resultant mobilities. *Gun Island* problematizes this discourse by considering the truly global scale of the climate crisis and investigates the position of the climate migrant beyond the bioregion to which one natively belongs by highlighting the connections between what seem to be separate, unconnected weather events. The novel contains a vast number of

characters who live in different parts of the world, and their encounters, as well as the relationships they develop, help create a story in which extreme weather events such as forest fires in the Pacific northwest, hailstorms in Italy in the summer, increasing frequency of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and the beaching of dolphins, are brought into conversation as manifestations of a shared ecological crisis.

Ghosh's situation of both these novels within history also works to legitimize climate migration as a historical phenomenon that predates the modern nation-state and highlights the arbitrariness of national borders. While *The Hungry Tide* achieves this by uncovering the massacre of India's first climate refugees, *Gun Island* examines the relationship between past and present through a historical and geographical mapping of a mythological legend. The plot of *Gun Island* is interspersed with mentions of the travels and travails of the Banduki Saudagar (Gun Merchant), a mythical hero-pirate who tries to flee the wrath of the snake goddess Manasa Devi, and sails to Europe from South Asia to escape the storms and cyclones she sends his way. The Banduki Saudagar thus emerges as a historical climate refugee, whose tale animates the experiences of present-day migrants such as the novel's protagonist Deen Dutta, a historian and rare-book dealer from New York who, on an annual visit to his family in Kolkata, visits the Gun Merchant's shrine in the Sundarbans. History factors heavily into the way

the present operates in the novel. When Deen's friend Cinta, a celebrated Italian historian enters the narrative, the two begin to trace connections between the myth of the Banduki Saudagar and actual historical weather events, showing that what exists today as myth actually has roots in history. A brief account of an academic conference that Deen and Cinta attend includes a presentation on the historic climate migration ushered by the Little Ice Age of the seventeenth century. A chance mention of the Taj Mahal during this presentation triggers Deen into making connections between the events of the Little Ice Age and the places mentioned in the Banduki Saudagar's accounts-

That took my mind back to India, and it occurred to me that the temples of Bishnupur were built at about the same time. This in turn reminded me of the Gun Merchant's shrine . . . and I suddenly recalled the droughts, famines, storms and plagues that played so large a part in the legend. Was it possible that the legend was born of the tribulations of the Little Ice Age? (Gun Island, 136)

As the novel proceeds, Deen and Cinta continue to decipher geographical locations embedded in the myth to emphasize the timelessness of human environmental migration. They realize that the Merchant was called Banduki not because of the Hindi/Bangla word for gun "banduk", but because of the Arabic-Byzantine name for Venice, Banadiq. Taal misrir desh, a major stop in the

Gun Merchant's journey is revealed to be not sugar-candy land (from the Bangla word *misri* for sugar), but Egypt, from the Arabic word *Misr* (Gun Island, 151). The Gun Merchant's path thus illuminates the current migratory patterns of climate refugees in the novel, who move from the uncertain shores of Bangladesh to the Middle East and Africa to find refuge in Europe.

As the pieces of this puzzle come together, the narrative introduces us to several other wanderers, whose status as traveler/settler/refugee is dependent on their socio-political identities. The novel is written as a loose sequel to *The Hungry Tide*, with Piya (now dividing her time travelling between Oregon and the Sundarbans, living as a resident in both places) as the main recurring character. The mobility of characters like Deen, Cinta, and Piya, who travel from New York to New Delhi to the Sundarbans to Venice to California, is pitted against the refugee characters Tipu and Rafi, a young gay couple who escapes the Sundarbans hinterlands, both due to its environmental vulnerability, but also because the state seems to have accepted its imminent destruction and made it a place without a future. Their journey to find asylum takes them to Bangladesh, back to the Indian mainland, then Pakistan, Iran Turkey, Libya, and Egypt as they finally make their way on to the shores of Italy. This journey, beset with human traffickers, hostile law enforcement, and apathetic governments, is revealed to be eerily akin to that of the Gun Merchant. The novel

sets these journeys up to show the vast inequalities that govern global systems of mobility and culminates in a fictional recreation of the European refugee crisis of 2015, when, in the aftermath of the Syrian war, an estimated 1.3 million refugees arrived in Europe. Heads of state of several countries like Greece and Italy refused to allow boats to dock on their shores, leading to the deaths of hundreds of migrants. *Gun Island* thus extends the scope of climate migration to include not just immediate disasters, but the imminent ones that result from the slow violence of the Anthropocene, and highlights the similarities that can still be traced between historic and contemporary events.

Through Tipu and Rafi, Ghosh allows the readers to glimpse the human face of the climate refugee. According to Matthew Schneider-Meyerson and Giovanni Bettini, literary works that represent climate refugees as faceless masses inadvertently generate fear in the environmentally secure, and feeds into larger anti-immigrant sentiment³ that often mingles with racism. In this light, *Gun Island's* etching out of individual refugee personalities, as young men and women with dreams, humour, flaws, and love, offers an alternative that tackles the problem of scale without erasing the individuality of the migrants. It is in this novel that Ghosh makes a stronger case for the humanity of the dispossessed. While *The Hungry Tide* had clear sympathies with the refugees of Marichjhapi, the actual refugees- Kusum (and to a lesser extent her son Fokir)- were presented through the per-

spectives of the privileged, upper caste Kanai, Nirmal, and Piya, who initially viewed them as foils to their own characters, and then, even as their bonds developed, as objects of their respective desires. Beyond Kusum and Fokir, we actually never hear from the actual refugees that crossed the border, and the one time we do, it is through Nirmal's distanced perspective. Nirmal's journal reveals that as he arrived at Marichjhapi during the state's crackdown on the migrants, from the safe distance of the bhotbhoti (boat), he heard a chorus of defiance on the shore: "we heard the settlers shouting a refrain: 'Marichjhapi chharbona. We'll not leave Marichjhapi, do what you may.'" Standing on the deck of the bhotbhoti, I was struck by the beauty of this. Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave. I joined my feeble voice to theirs: Marichjhapi chharbona!" (*The Hungry Tide*, 254) Nirmal's admiration for the collectivity and defiance notwithstanding, we do not get to see the migrants as individuals beyond their plight as refugees.

On the other hand, *Gun Island* not only legitimizes the concerns of the refugees, but also presents the readers with their voices and the multiplicity of their perspectives through Tipu, Rafi, and the other Bengali refugees in Venice. The narrative traces the journey and growth of Tipu, another character from *The Hungry Tide*- Fokir's son who earlier went by Tutul. In a way, the narrative works as a minor bildungsroman touching upon Tipu's experiences with his father's death, his attempts at fitting in in the USA as Piya's ward, his return to India, his

plans to escape the lack of opportunity and imminent collapse of the ways of life in the Sundarbans, and his coming to terms with his sexuality and desire to build a life with Rafi in Europe.

Through the representation of the refugee characters, *Gun Island* challenges the discourse about the primitivism of ecosystem people and counters concerns about their assimilation in a modern society. Both Tipu and Rafi, while economically impoverished, display a technological aptitude and intelligence that forces the middle-class Deen to confront his bourgeois biases about poverty and migrants. “Tourists are often surprised to see we have cellphones here”, says Rafi in response to Deen’s surprise. (*Gun Island*, 94) In this interaction, it is Deen who is revealed to be the unaware outsider, even though his status as a tourist offers him more mobility across national lines. Deen’s astonishment at Rafi’s adeptness with satellite phones, and his medicinal knowledge when Tipu is bitten by a King Cobra, work to challenge the readers’ own biases about climate refugees and their ability to assimilate, and also posits technology as a means of connecting different parts of the world. Rafi tells Deen that people living in remote areas like the Sundarbans not only have greater need of the internet and access to GPS and weather reports, but this technology also allows them to dream of a better life by introducing the existence of different places and possibilities. “The Internet is the migrants’ magic carpet” Tipu tells Deen, “It’s their conveyor belt. It doesn’t matter

whether they are travelling by plane or bus or boat; it's the Internet that moves the wetware." (*Gun Island*, 61). The novel's progress emphasizes this recognition of the connection between climate migrants and contemporary media and technology. Deen (and the readers) are made aware of Tipu's struggles as an asylum seeker through his email correspondence. The novel's climax, where a boat full of supporters goes to protect the incoming migrant ship against the attack from an anti-immigration militia, is able to garner public support through a social media campaign organized by Rafi.

Gun Island further dismantles the prevailing narrative about immigration as a drain on the host country by highlighting the contributions of the Bangladeshi migrant community in Venice. On a visit to Venice, Deen once again encounters Rafi, who had gotten separated from Tipu on their journey, and who now lives in the Venice ghetto and works under the table to pay the traffickers to get Tipu across. Lubna, a former immigrant who now runs an organization to help the newer arrivals, informs Deen that the Venice ghetto houses a community of migrants who work jobs such as construction and selling goods which are crucial to Venice's economic functioning while they live in extreme poverty and uncertainty-

most of them work all day long, doing several different jobs. They barely get any sleep. On top of that, some of them haven't yet had their incontro – that's

the meeting with the committee that decides on their status. And I'm sad to say there have been problems in the past for those who spoke with journalists – anything they say to the media can be used against them. You understand? And there are other problems as well. Sometimes right-wing troublemakers see things on television and get all worked up – you know how things are nowadays. (*Gun Island*, 176)

This illustration of the refugees' lives challenges xenophobic descriptions that paint them as being dependent on state welfare and drives home the precariousness of their existence.

Literature that seeks to empathetically portray climate migration has to consistently overcome the issue of geographical scale, and create tales that can resonate globally, without losing sight of the localized differences of environmental experiences. In her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, Ursula Heise highlights the dilemma that has punctuated theories of environmental justice across the world: “some theorists criticize nationally based forms of identity and hold out cosmopolitan identifications as a plausible and politically preferable alternative, other scholars emphasize the importance of holding on to national and local modes of belonging as a way of resisting the imperialism of some forms of globalization.” (Heise, 17) This dichotomy becomes especially relevant in the context of climate migration where, while theories of place are extremely important in order to under-

stand how environmental habits in one corner of the world can have drastic effects in another, the globe can function as an effective discursive trope to counter the rhetoric of nationalism and difference in favor of representing a shared humanity. This simultaneous exploration of vast geographical and temporal distances often teeters on the periphery of what is considered improbable, another criticism that Ghosh attempts to address in *The Great Derangement* as indicative of older forms of edification that no longer hold true in our current environmental moment. He mentions how his experience of a rare tornado in Delhi in the 1970s had been formative for his development as a writer, yet he always avoided including that incident in his writings for fear of being written off. But in *Gun Island*, Ghosh includes an incident where Venice sees a similarly uncharacteristic hailstorm, no longer as an anomaly but as an indicator of unpredictable weather patterns that are the result of global climate change. As the writer Rajat Chaudhary states in his review of *Gun Island*, “because climate change knows no boundaries and can spring surprises and violent retribution at a place of its choosing, and also because stories connect with stories riding microscopic filaments of probability and chance, the characters of *Gun Island* find out how an angry planet stitches them together in the present, as it had in the past, when the gun merchant was running away from a wrathful goddess.” (Chaudhary, 1) This deliberate undercutting of the supposed boundaries of realism allows for a merging of the global

and local through climate change, and helps readers far away from the locus of the action to understand the motivating factors that would drive people to seek shelter in distant lands. The climax of the novel, where a group of dolphins interrupt the stand-off between the refugee boat and the Italian navy and lead to a change of heart from the admiral, is another instance of the uncanny, a moment of eruption and spectacle that the novel form employs to speculate on a positive outcome for climate refugees.

Gun Islands's optimistic conclusion seems to find resonance in recent developments. On December 09 2022, Pradyut Bordoloi, a Member of Parliament from the state of Assam, and a member of the Indian National Congress (currently the leading opposition party in the country) introduced the Climate Migrants (Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill in the Lok Sabha. The bill proposes funding for both immediate as well as protracted weather events. In an interview with *Scroll Magazine*, Bordoloi highlights the limitations of the current climate law, the National Action for Climate Change passed in 2008 for being “geared more towards short-term and sudden-onset climatic disasters [and] ignoring slow climatic changes”. Bordoloi explains that “The Brahmaputra River system is dotted with islands where mostly people of migrant origin, usually from the minority community, settle down...Earlier, the life cycle of an established riverine island [till it would get submerged] would be

around 20 years. But, of late, in the last 10 years or so, because of the erratic water flow in the Brahmaputra, it's gone down to four-five years." The proposed bill thus attempts to redefine the scale of climate catastrophes to account for slow-acting factors. The bill also focuses on issues of rehabilitation, especially for communities that rely on specific environmental factors for their lifestyle and traditions, and recognizes the nexus between social and environmental exploitation within India's unique social context of class, caste, and religion. There are still several challenges, however. The bill needs to pass in the Indian Parliament which currently has a majority by the BJP and its allies. And despite Bordoloi's comments about the need to consider migrants from Bangladesh in the grand scheme of things, the bill solely focuses on migration within India. Nevertheless, the language of the draft reveals that cultural conversations around the topic of climate migration have evolved to consider the issue of slow violence and its resultant geopolitical complexities.

Thus, while there are several challenges in the path of creating an empathetic narrative that centers climate migrants, Ghosh's attempts in this series of books present a promising shift in the zeitgeist, and offer an example of how the novel form can tell stories that operate within spatio-temporal scales that can adequately address the scope of climate migration in the Anthropocene. *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* ought to be read as strong

proponents of environmental justice that present climate migration as a global humanitarian crisis and challenge the prevailing discourse on refugees.

NOTES:

1. *The Hungry Tide*, 254

2. The definition of refugee status laid out in 1951 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, states that a refugee is any person who, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it” (McKee, 315)

3. Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, “Just as in the Book? The Influence of Literature on Readers’ Awareness of Climate Injustice and Perception of Climate Migrants”. Giovanni Bettini, “Climate Barbarians at the Gate? A critique of apocalyptic narratives on climate refugees”

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From Belligerency to Recovery: A Post-colonial Account of Navigating Partition Trauma in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*

Trijit Mukherjee

Introduction

Celebrated for her poignant and immersive storytelling, Bapsi Sidhwa encapsulates the harrowing ordeals of Partition in *Cracking India*. The novel explores the depths of profound loss, pervasive trauma, and the strenuous endeavour to reconstruct lives amid the ensuing chaos. Through the innocent yet astute perspective of young Lenny Sethi, Sidhwa vividly depicts the brutal realities of Partition, unveiling the complex and multifaceted dimensions of human suffering. This paper extensively analyses the loss of personal identities experienced by Sidhwa's characters, particularly focusing on two victimized women, Lenny Sethi and Shanta Ayah, and their re-

sulting identity crises under postcolonial scrutiny. It dissects how Partition breaks their self-perception, pushing them into a state of existential crisis. Furthermore, the sense of communal identity crisis is not limited to just individual characters; with Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus embroiled in violent riots against each other, reflecting the pervasive societal fragmentation. By examining these stories through the infiltration of trauma theory, the paper explores the profound psychological scars borne by specific characters, shedding light on their traumatic encounters and the ensuing psychological disintegration. Nevertheless, it also tells the story of the healing journey, focusing on how Sidhwa's characters find their way to recovery. The paper illustrates how, despite the pervasive trauma, characters find resilience and recovery, embodying the human spirit's tenacity and capacity for regeneration as described by the author.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This paper takes literature as its primary aspect with a female character to support this aspect, and two literary theories to serve both research questions. This paper examines the themes of loss and its effects through Edward Soja's postcolonial theory of Spatial Justice. Furthermore, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory of the unclaimed experience is employed to explore the process of trauma and recovery among the characters.

1.2 Research Methodology

By adopting a qualitative approach, this paper aims to analyse the themes of loss, identity, and trauma in

Sidhwa's *Cracking India*. The research focuses on Soja's Spatial Justice to explore how space and place impact personal and communal identity. Caruth's Trauma Theory of Unclaimed Experience is applied to examine the characters' experiences of trauma and recovery. The study does not attempt to interconnect Soja's and Caruth's theories directly but uses them to frame specific questions about spatial manipulation and unclaimed experiences of trauma. This methodological framework serves as the *modus operandi* for analysing the novel's depiction of Partition and its aftermath.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper will investigate the following questions:

- 1.How does *Cracking India* portray the theme of loss and its impact on personal and communal identity through Edward Soja's theory of Spatial Justice?
- 2.How does *Cracking India* depict the process of trauma and recovery among its characters through Cathy Caruth's theory of unclaimed experience?

Identity Disintegration and the Spatial Justice in *Cracking India*

2.1 Personal Identities and the Disintegration

The burning of the liver, the eyes' eagerness, the hearts' grief, Remain unaffected by this cure for disunion's pain; From where did the beloved, the morning breeze come? Where did it go? ("Subh-E-Azadi" 2017)

Depicting the profound sorrow and disillusionment of the India-Pakistan Partition, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Subh-e-Azadi* resonates deeply with the thematic essence of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*. The poem's lamentation over never-ending pain and unmet dreams reflects the struggles of Sidhwa's characters trapped in personal and communal breakdowns. Faiz's verses mirror Lenny's loss of innocence and Ayah's tragic destiny with their burning sorrow and hopeful gaze. Just as Faiz's lines question the transient solace offered by the dawn breeze, Sidhwa's narrative interrogates the hard-to-reach healing process and the lasting wounds left on the individuals affected by Partition.

The compulsory relocation during the Partition of 1947 had a catastrophic effect on individual identity. In *Cracking India*, Lenny and Shanta Ayah undergo significant loss and displacement caused by the turmoil, illustrating how space is used to amplify social injustices. Edward Soja's *Spatial Justice* is essential for comprehending how forced migration during Partition resulted in a substantial loss of individual identity. Soja argues that space plays a crucial role in influencing social relationships and justice, rather than just serving as a background for social interactions. In *Cracking India*, this is evident as the characters navigate the upheaval caused by Partition. For instance, Lenny's innocence is shattered as she witnesses the violence and disorder that follow. Likewise, the kidnapping and following ordeal of Shanta Ayah emphasize

the destructive effects of altering one's personal identity through spatial control. Sidhwa writes, "They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet - that want to move backwards - are forced forward instead ." (Sidhwa 1991, 149). This violent violation of Ayah's personal boundaries represents the wider societal injustices at hand and how compulsory relocation disrupts one's identity. According to Soja's Spatial Justice, it is evident that the manipulation of space during Partition was not just a physical displacement but also a profound dislocation of personal identity. This theoretical model examines the intricate relationship between space, identity, and justice in the story, showing how the characters' identities are permanently changed by the enforced relocation and resulting social injustices.

Lenny Sethi's innocent perception of the world around her, starkly juxtaposed with the brutality of the Partition, highlights the deep scars left by the spatial and social upheaval. Lenny Sethi, a four-year-old Parsee girl marked by her painful honesty and incapacity to lie, is also burdened with the affliction of polio. Her physical restrictions and candid demeanour are intertwined, shaping how she interacts and how others view her. Facing the harsh truths of religious violence during the Partition, Lenny experiences significant changes in her identity due to shifting spatial boundaries. The abrupt assignment of religious labels and resulting violence dehumanize individuals, simplifying their identities into

symbolic categories, “One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols .” (Sidhwa 1991, 80). This forced simplification and the violent redrawing of spatial lines profoundly disrupt Lenny’s understanding of herself and her world, precipitating a deep identity crisis.

Lenny’s personal space, once a sanctuary, becomes a site of violence and betrayal. This alteration of space greatly affects her sense of self, as she struggles with losing her childhood innocence and facing the brutal truths of her environment. Her reflective thoughts express her poignant confusion and fear regarding the fragmentation of both geographical and societal aspects, “Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother’s then?” (Sidhwa 1991, 80). These reflections underscore her struggle to comprehend the tangible and intangible changes around her. The story vividly shows how Partition’s external chaos not only divides the physical surroundings but also the psychological and social identities of individuals through Lenny’s perspective. The intricate interplay between innocence and experience in Lenny’s journey during this tumultuous period underscores the profound impact of external events on personal identity, illustrating how deeply spatial reconfigurations can affect an individual’s sense of self.

Lenny's 18-year-old nanny, Shanta Ayah's sense of self, previously based on her position and connections in Lenny's home are abruptly shifted as she becomes a target of collective animosity. When a mob discovers Shanta Ayah, at home, her life changes drastically. The mob drags her away, and she is forced into prostitution by Ice-candy-man, who later marries her, and she becomes Mumtaz. This violent abduction marks the beginning of a profound identity crisis for Ayah. Ayah, who was once a source of maternal comfort and stability for Lenny, now exemplifies the harsh effects of spatial manipulation and communal violence on individual identities as she is forced into a life of exploitation and abuse. The narrative captures this harrowing transformation, "Though she looks more ragged - and thin - her face and hands splotted with pale dry patches and her lips cracked," (Sidhwa 1991, 81). This powerful portrayal highlights Ayah's inner conflict and the deep sense of displacement she feels. The once vibrant and nurturing Ayah is now a symbol of the 'devastating effects of spatial manipulation and violence' on personal identity, stripped of her autonomy and subjected to the whims of those who wield power through violence. Her situation underscores how the distribution of space and power during Partition reshaped people's lives, causing lasting wounds and pushing them into unfamiliar roles and identities. Ayah's shift from a cherished caregiver to a prey of kidnapping and misuse showcases the individual misfortunes intertwined with the broader historical turmoil of Partition.

Bapsi Sidhwa's storytelling in *Cracking India* powerfully echoes Edward Soja's theory of Spatial Justice, demonstrating her insightful grasp of how spatial control impacts individual identities. Sidhwa's depiction of the Partition goes beyond just narrating historical events, delving deeply into the spatial aspects of individual suffering and identity displacement. Her keen understanding of literature aligns with Soja's claim that space plays a crucial role in creating social inequalities, solidifying her work as an essential text in discussions of Spatial Justice. Sidhwa highlights the close relationship between space, power, and personal identity by incorporating personal traumas into the geographical upheaval of Partition.

2.2 Communal Identities and the Disintegration

The narrative in *Cracking India* captures the bitter conflict among Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus during Partition, reflecting the pernicious effects of spatial manipulation that ultimately results in a few repugnant. Edward Soja's Spatial Justice explains that the conflicts between communities were not just random acts of violence, but instead stemmed from purposeful changes in space that increased competition for land and resources. The novel details the brutal communal confrontations, where "the red bricks of Lahore are stained with blood" emphasizing the harsh truth of the competition for control over space. The spatial redistribution fuelled resentment and resulted in harmful patterns of retaliation and payback.

This clash over space highlights the importance of spatial justice, since the random creation of boundaries and the displacements of people disrupted traditional ways of living, fuelling sectarian tensions. *Cracking India* reveals the devastating outcomes of spatial injustices, where the desire for spatial control led to widespread suffering and systemic violence, leaving lasting scars on the socio-cultural environment.

In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa's depiction of the communal violence during Partition serves as a harrowing testament to the catastrophic consequences of spatial reconfiguration. The violent upheaval in Pir Pindo village, now a part of India, is triggered by the Sikhs, in a frenzied bid to assert control, massacre nearly everyone, triggering a Ghadar. Edward Soja's *Spatial Justice* reveals that this violent incident highlights how the random changing of boundaries and enforced relocations heightened preexisting conflicts and sparked unprecedented aggression. The novel meticulously details the descent into chaos, where the manipulation of space exacerbates sectarian rivalries, leading to bloodshed and ruin. The systematic slaughter in Pir Pindo epitomizes the devastating impact of spatial injustice on communal harmony, where the relentless quest for spatial dominance obliterates centuries-old bonds and creates feelings of mistrust and hostility. Sidhwa's narrative, through its vivid and unflinching portrayal of such atrocities, reveals the profound and enduring scars left by the spatial upheavals of Par-

tition, showcasing how the disruption of spatial equilibrium not only displaces individuals but also dismantles the very fabric of inter-community relations, leading to irrevocable loss and suffering.

The loss of communal identity during Partition becomes a potent weapon for characters like Ice-candy-man in *Cracking India*. Dilnawaz, the Ice-candy-man, showcases how the breakdown of social connections can be used to advance personal grudges, aligning with Soja's concept of Spatial Justice. As a pretentious Sufi, Ice-candy-man hides his malicious motives behind spiritualism, but his real character shows a deep sense of Schadenfreude. He orchestrates communal violence to seek revenge on Shanta by manipulating the volatile environment to achieve his goals. By abetting her Muslim brothers into capturing her, he exploits the breakdown of community bonds, demonstrating how spatial upheaval and social fragmentation can be weaponized. His behaviour highlights the dark possibilities of manipulating space, as breaking down shared identities can allow personal grudges to thrive. The chaos of Partition provides Ice-candy-man with the perfect backdrop to enact his revenge, as the traditional structures of trust and kinship are eroded. The spatial reconfiguration not only disturbs physical spaces but also breaks down the moral and social structure of society, allowing individuals like Ice-candy-man to take advantage of these cracks. Sidhwa uses this character to showcase how spatial justice can

have a negative aspect, as the manipulation of space and identity is not only a result of political choices but also a means for personal harm. The actions of the Ice-candy-man bring attention to the dangerous overlap of individual grievances and communal violence, demonstrating how the breakdown of communal identity can be used to commit more atrocities. This use of societal breakdown showcases the significant and harmful effects of spatial injustice, as the reshaping of physical and social structures leads to an environment full of chances for revenge and aggression, ultimately increasing the pain and disorder of Partition.

The British leaders, playing a devious role in the Partition riots, illustrate how controlling space and power can result in harmful societal unrest. Their strategic gerrymandering and the infamous “divide and rule” policy did not just sew long-standing animosity and distrust among the groups but also encouraged a climate conducive to conflict and disharmony. Deliberately worsening already existing tensions by frequently showing favouritism towards one community over another to maintain control ultimately led to irreparable damage to the social structure. This deliberate bias and manipulation of geographic boundaries exacerbated social rifts, complicating the process of reconciliation. The sudden and haphazard exit of the British sparked violence, revealing a significant disregard for the socio-political intricacies they had historically taken advantage of. The sudden de-

parture created a void in power and led to a disorderly reshuffling of borders, resulting in the outbreak of communal violence. The actions of the British rulers show how spatial injustice can have a destructive effect when space is manipulated as a means of control and domination, leading to severe consequences for the residents in these areas. The boundaries that were imposed artificially and the chaotic withdrawal that followed sparked intense communal hostility, revealing the dangerous combination of manipulating space and imperial ambitions. By serving as bystanders to the ensuing violence, the British rulers underscored their moral bankruptcy, as their policies and actions laid the groundwork for the mass atrocities that followed. Their participation in the Partition riots serves as a clear example of how control over territory and authority can result in significant societal breakdown. This underscores the central tenet of Soja's Spatial Justice, where the control and configuration of space are inextricably linked to the production of social injustices.

Unclaimed Trauma and Gradual Recovery in *Cracking India*

3.1 Trauma and the Unclaimed Experience

Sidhwa's storytelling in *Cracking India* closely reflects Cathy Caruth's trauma theory of unclaimed experience, showing the fragmented and non-linear quality of traumatic memory. Using Caruth's theory as a framework, Sidhwa delves into the traumatic effects of the Parti-

tion, revealing how it interrupts the flow of memory and sense of self. The narrative oscillates between past and present, mirroring the characters' shattered recollections, thereby emphasizing the enduring impact of traumatic experiences. The fragmented narrative mirrors the characters' difficulty in understanding and expressing their pain, emphasizing the indescribable essence of trauma discussed by Caruth. Sidhwa's characters struggle with their fragmented memories, as their identities are constantly being reshaped by traumatic events that keep coming back. This nonlinear narrative structure symbolizes Caruth's claim that trauma, as an unclaimed event, cannot fully integrate into one's consciousness, continuing to linger in the mind. The narrative's cracks and breaks mirror the characters' inner chaos, underscoring how trauma changes how one views time and self at a core level. Sidhwa's skilful utilization of this fragmented form not only captures the disorienting impact of trauma but also urges the reader to connect with the deep sense of dislocation felt by her characters, fitting perfectly with Caruth's theoretical framework.

The horror faced by Ice-candy-man in Sidhwa's *Cracking India* is vividly depicted when he sees a horrific scene of a train from Gurdaspur carrying the bodies of deceased Muslims. Sidhwa narrates,

Ice-candy-man comes to an abrupt and jolted halt. He is breathless, reeking of sweat and dust, and his frantic eyes rake the group. They rest for an instant

on the Sikh, and flutter back to us. “A train from Gurdaspur has just come in,” he announces, panting. “Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts!” Ice-candy-man’s grip on the handlebars is so tight that his knuckles bulge whitely in the pale light . (Sidhwa 1991, 123)

This traumatic event triggers his spiral into aggression and retribution. The Ice-candy-man’s change, triggered by the untold trauma of witnessing brutality, corresponds to Caruth’s idea of unclaimed experience, where trauma interrupts identity and memory, resulting in harmful actions. This horrifying moment creates a lasting impact on his mind, leading him into a cycle of seeking revenge and being cruel. The additional pain of this situation is intensified by the widespread communal conflicts present in the story, showing how personal distress is both a result and a catalyst of group turmoil. The unaddressed trauma of Ice-candy-man not only leads to his involvement in communal violence but also showcases the harmful effects of unresolved trauma, resulting in more rounds of violence and revenge. His behaviour, influenced by the trauma from the partition, highlights the significant effect of unacknowledged experiences on personal and group actions, as vividly portrayed in Sidhwa’s story.

The religious trauma portrayed in *Cracking India* is closely connected with Caruth’s idea of unclaimed experi-

ence, where traumatic incidents linger and torment the sufferers without being resolved. Imam Din, the Muslim chef of the Sethi family, demonstrates this trauma by being pressured to falsely swear to protect Ayah from the Muslim mobs. The deep religious and moral turmoil he experiences during the Partition is reflected in his internal struggle and the sacrilegious act he is compelled to perform. Likewise, when Master Tara Singh visits Lahore and gives a speech against Muslims, it leads to a violent outbreak of killing and burning, showing the destructive effects of religious provocation on community relations. This speech sparks violent conflicts, worsening existing religious tensions and causing a lasting impact on the community's collective mindset. These events underscore how religious trauma during the Partition manifests through forced sacrilegious acts and incitement to violence, creating a cycle of hatred and retribution that perpetuates the communal divide.

The conflicts between religions and their mud-slinging in *Cracking India* are powerful causes of trauma, echoing Caruth's theory of unclaimed experience. Her theory posits that traumatic events often remain unresolved, continually haunting the affected individuals. The book vividly depicts how these conflicts are shown through words and actions between religious groups, causing lasting emotional wounds. For instance, the venomous confrontations and allegations among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs are not just temporary bursts of anger but derive from longstanding grievances and uncertainties.

This inter-religious mud-slinging worsens the already tense atmosphere, resulting in increased violence and suspicion. The communal violence, fuelled by inflammatory language and long-standing hostilities, demonstrates how the lasting effects of Partition are continued through recurring cycles of revenge and animosity. This relentless conflict underscores Caruth's concept that trauma if not acknowledged and dealt with, can cause damage to individuals and communities for a prolonged time. The emotional impact of these clashes between different religions is deep, as individuals are always reminded of their pain and grievances, hindering any real possibility of reconciliation or healing. Through the lens of unclaimed experience, the novel encapsulates the enduring legacy of Partition's religious trauma, highlighting the destructive power of unresolved historical wounds.

3.2 Lenny's Perspective and Trauma through the Unclaimed Experience

Lenny's naive view of the violent events of Partition provides a distinctive and heartfelt way to observe trauma, mirroring Caruth's idea of unclaimed experience. As a young kid, Lenny's firsthand encounters are unedited and uncensored, depicting the deep and sometimes confusing influence of the violence she witnesses. Her disability gives her a unique clarity and directness in her observations that many adults do not have. This perspective from a child highlights the harsh truths of trau-

ma, untouched by adult explanations or protections, uncovering the profound emotional damage caused by the disorder and violence of Partition. Sidhwa communicates the enduring and widespread impact of trauma by portraying it through the perspective of someone who observes it in its purest state, as illustrated by Lenny.

Lenny's lack of experience and innocence peak when she trustingly divulges Ayah's location to Ice-candy-man, resulting in Ayah being raped. Lenny is deeply affected by this act, which is a result of a child's candid honesty. The traumatic event of Shanta being forcibly taken away has a profound impact on Lenny, changing her views on safety and trust permanently. This example demonstrates Caruth's unclaimed experience, where trauma is not completely understood or incorporated into the victim's story. The sudden invasion of the Sethi house and the resulting arrest of Ayah devastates Lenny, leaving her feeling overwhelmed with guilt and confusion. The betrayal suffered by Ayah and observed by Lenny turns her innocence into a constant source of torment as she struggles with the outcomes of her unintentional deeds. This traumatic event, laden with emotional upheaval, disrupts the continuity of Lenny's experiences, resulting in fragmented memories that trouble her.

The non-linear and fragmented nature of Lenny's recollections further illustrates the gaps in memory characteristic of trauma. The brutality of the Partition dis-

rupts her perception of time and reality, leading her to vividly recall traumatic moments in a fragmented way. These memory gaps highlight how traumatic events can disrupt a person's sense of self and coherence. Lenny's story, characterized by these interruptions, emphasizes the lasting impact of trauma, as her fragmented memories show how the past continues to affect her current state. This representation echoes Caruth's theory, illustrating how the effects of trauma go beyond the initial incident, persistently shaping the victim's understanding and sense of self.

Lenny's enduring trauma, rooted in the harrowing events of Partition, leaves indelible scars on her identity. These traumatic experiences greatly impact her development, highlighting the persistent and widespread effects of trauma. This is in line with the unclaimed experience, where trauma still influences a person's identity and viewpoint well beyond the original occurrences. Lenny's lingering psychological effects from trauma, including fragmented memories, memory gaps, and unresolved guilt, emphasize how deeply it can impact identity and perspective, weaving a thread of pain and resilience in her story.

3.3 Communal Recovery and Resilience and the Unclaimed Experience

In *Cracking India*, the harrowing aftermath of Partition underscores an astonishing phenomenon; the ability of

society to bounce back in the face of destruction. Although the devastating trauma caused by shattered lives and histories, the communities portrayed in the novel show a strong ability to rebuild and strengthen their social bonds. Caruth's unclaimed experience illuminates this phenomenon by emphasizing how trauma, though deeply disruptive, can catalyse a process of collective resilience and recovery. Lenny's storytelling reveals a delicate balance between loss and resilience for readers to observe. The societies, after experiencing breakdown and disorder, work to recreate social connections, displaying an impressive skill in rebuilding support systems and communal unity. This comeback is not just about surviving, but about showing human strength and determination in dealing with both systemic and personal traumas. Caruth's insights suggest that trauma can lead to a reassessment of social ties and a revitalized dedication to community unity. Thus, *Cracking India* portrays not just the harsh truth of sorrow but also the strong determination that arises from such deep disturbance, showing a complex comprehension of how societies overcome and rise above their traumatic events. The novel vividly depicts how social resilience thrives amid the devastation of Partition, showing the inherent human ability to rebuild and recover from collective trauma.

In the denouement of *Cracking India*, Bapsi Sidhwa skilfully employs narrative techniques that enable a deep healing process from trauma. The narrative transcends

beyond just retelling events by using Lenny's character, becoming a therapeutic tool for coming to terms with past horrors. Caruth's insights into her unclaimed experience explain this phenomenon, showing how the gradual expression of traumatic memories leads to psychological cohesion. While Lenny delves into her fragmented memories, she starts to integrate her painful past into her current sense of self, turning scattered memories into a cohesive story. This process of narrative healing goes beyond just coping; it is also a significant step in taking back control of one's fragmented mind. By crafting her story with intention, Lenny, and by extension, find a sense of completion, demonstrating how storytelling can heal deep wounds. The novel's conclusion thus becomes a testament to the human capacity for healing through the articulation and integration of unclaimed experiences.

Conclusion

Cracking India stands as an enduring testament to the importance of recognizing history. Sidhwa urges readers to face and recognize past wrongdoings by exploring the trauma and recovery of its characters. The story serves as a strong message to strive for a fairer and more compassionate community. This exploration of pain and strength in literature stresses the importance of remembering history, and promoting a shared dedi-

cation to fairness and empathy. By delving into the visceral aftermath of Partition, the novel advocates for an empathetic reckoning with history, fostering a deeper understanding of the imperative to eschew repeated injustices. The paper employs Edward Soja's Spatial Justice and Cathy Caruth's unclaimed experience to dissect *Cracking India* through a postcolonial lens as well as a trauma theory, defending its exploration of loss, identity, and recovery. These theoretical frameworks bolster the analysis and effectively shed light on the novel's intricate connection between spatial dynamics, justice, and the impact of trauma.

The resilience exhibited by the characters in *Cracking India* underscores the indomitable human spirit's capacity to endure and transcend adversity. Their unwavering pursuit of self-discovery and fairness in the face of disorder and suffering stands as a powerful testament to human fortitude. This narrative emphasizes the crucial significance of this journey, showing how people continue to seek their identity and fight for fairness even when facing incredibly difficult challenges. The adventures of the characters illustrate the deep inner power within all humans, reinforcing the novel's message that resilience and the pursuit of justice are fundamental to overcoming the darkest of times.

The Partition of 1947 significantly altered the *Weltanschauung* of the Indian subcontinent, reshaping the

identities, beliefs, and perceptions of the affected populations. The Partition in *Cracking India* starkly underscores the paramount importance of empathy, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. The devastating occurrences of 1947 highlight the disastrous results of separation, underscoring the deep necessity for harmony and shared comprehension. By vividly portraying suffering and displacement, the novel implores readers to acknowledge the ongoing importance of compassion and solidarity. It shows how the lack of communal harmony leads to immense destruction, promoting a strong dedication to empathetic involvement and united societal connections. The narrative serves the importance of tolerance and understanding in preventing a catastrophic rupture in humanity.

NOTE:

1. *Cracking India* was originally published as *Ice Candy Man* in U.K. in 1988. Although it was first published as *Cracking India* in both India and U.S.A., it is now available in India as *Ice Candy Man*.

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Exploring the Flight from Nepali Ethnic Identity in Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*

Sucharita Laha

Nepal, the small Himalayan nation, has long served as the picturesque land of beautiful snow peaked mountains, scenic landscapes. In spite of that beautiful nature, one is unable to forget the fact that the denizens of the nation remained for long under the shadow of the civil war (1996-2006). The theme of war and trauma has been a recurring theme in many literary works. Manjushree Thapa, has been no exception to this phenomenon. Considered as the foremost diasporic voice of Nepal, Thapa in her novel *Seasons of Flight* does not present the topographic beauty of Nepal, rather she presents the geo-political scenario and the situational

reality which compel her protagonist Prema to fly away from her native land. An individual sense of identity is intertwined with the calamitous impact of trauma. War in the native land can create trauma as it effects the psyche of an individual. The harrowing impact of trauma can create a sense of disconnection from one's ethnic identity. As ethnic identity is a social form of identity, it incorporates various factors like social issues, cultural experiences, religious practices and personal beliefs. Ethnic identity also denotes a person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Ethnic identity can evolve over time. Political conflicts in any nation are major reasons for people's dispersion, as the conflict zones fail to provide better hopes and opportunities for the people. They become more hopeless after witnessing hatred and violence. When Prema was working in an NGO in hill bazar, the rise of Maoist uprising in her native land jeopardised her sense of safety and security. It also reduced the chance of economic prosperity in Nepali society. In this backdrop, the computer shop owner Kancha who was Prema's neighbour was arrested and disappeared. Prema was deeply affected by this particular event as "Kancha's abduction disheartened Prema, and made her withdraw into herself" (Thapa 2012, 63). Not only the war in Nepal but the narrow religious practices, cultural experiences in Nepal also traumatize the protagonist Prema. She feels suffocation in her own land. She tries to escape from her ethnic identity and reconstruct a new identity in a new land.

The Maoist insurgency in Nepal disrupted people's life and increased tensions among people in Nepal. When the Maoist rebels came in the village, they forced other people to join with them. Prema's sister Bijaya also joined in the war. This war actually shatters Prema's psyche and prompts her to think about escaping from her ethnic identity. The violence of war, especially Kancha's disappearance makes her realise the truth: "Prema was convinced the war would escalate from here on. The Maoists would not give up, [...] people who had nothing to do with either side would get drawn in" (Thapa 2012, 66). She suffers from a dilemma and thinks "Should she not leave? This shabby, Third World country" (Thapa 2012, 66). The war had confounded her mental state. Her thinking of war and her previous encounter with the Maoists scar her mind as "she recalled, with revulsion, the soldier who had asked her for identification" (Thapa 2012, 66) and she started to think "What if the Maoists were to come here, as they had to her birth village? She kept feeling a shivering in the marrow" (Thapa 2012, 66). The trauma and the violence of war lead to the subsequent flight of people in search of peace and better opportunities.

Prema sets out on a journey in order to escape from her Nepali ethnic identity and her native land that is infested with Maoist aggression. Prema moves to America and she tries to adjust herself and create a new identity in

a new land. After arriving in America, she starts to live in “Little Nepal” in Virginia (Thapa 2012,108) where many people of the Nepali community live in America. But unlike most immigrants who prefer a close attachment with their own people in a foreign land, Prema believes that her relationship with them actually has kept her outside America. Their companionship reminds Prema about her own ethnic country and thereby, it makes Prema to retain her Nepali ethnic identity from which she wants to escape. Their companionship immobilises Prema’s search for new identity as “she felt stuck on the outside of America [...] and their talk invariably turned homeward: the Maoist rebels, the king and the army, the faltering movement for peace” (Thapa 2012, 112). But Prema wanted to see what lay beyond Little Nepal and reinvent herself in America.

Prema’s quest for adopting American identity forces her to cut off contact with home and “she stopped looking up the news of Nepal on the Internet, and let her email account expire” (Thapa 2012, 116). She disconnects her connection with fellow Nepali migrants Neeru and Sushil in order to escape from her Nepali identity and create a cosmopolitan identity in a multicultural society in America. “Prema left Little Nepal as abruptly as she had left Nepal” (Thapa 2012, 117) and she goes far away from the Nepalese circle of Sushil and Neeru as to become a complete American. She strives to create her identity in a foreign land through acculturation. To

be Americanized, she mimics American people and she buys a red bikini and flip-flops. “Mimicking them she jumped as the water level rose; she jumped again when it rose again” (Thapa 2012, 79 and 80). Prema feels sexually liberated in America and enjoys her body. Sexual liberation was something unimaginable in the Nepali culture. While in Nepal she had to keep her relationship with Rajan secret, in America she has casual sexual encounters with different men. As part of this acculturation she also attends Thanksgiving and Christmas ceremony in Luis’s family gathering. By mimicking American culture, she turns into a hybridized entity. In Bhabha’s terms, the discourse of mimicry “is constructed around ambivalence” (Bhabha 1994, 86). Prema’s state in a foreign land is quite ambiguous. As a girl from Third World country Prema feels the superiority of First World country like America. She, therefore, tries to adopt American culture by mimicking their ways and customs. Though she is trying to fly away from her ethnic identity, but she cannot find a sense of satisfaction in the host country as her memory keeps haunting her. As Khem Guragaini points out “Prema, therefore, remains unfulfilled and torn between her past life in Nepal and her newly discovered ‘confused’ life in America” (Guragaini 2014, 63). Jane Fernandez in her article “Framing the Diaspora: Politics of Identity and Belonging” argues:

The several definitions of diaspora: whether involving the dispersion of a classical group/people, or

forced dislocation from the homeland, or voluntary migration, or indicating an attachment to multiple nations/histories, has one thing in common. In all these varying categories, the underlying premise that girds the issues of diaspora involves concepts of identity and belonging.(29)

Prema wants to rebuild a new identity. But Prema faces many problems in trying to assimilate American culture. She experiences a psychological state of ambiguous or in-betweenness. To embrace American culture “Prema has to undergo a cultural transformation in order to embrace American culture, and assert herself and identity” (Guragaini 2014, 64). She faces various difficulties and keeps drifting from one place to another. Her dream of fulfilling her desires through an escape from her ethnic identity results in a kind of botched cosmopolitanism that ends up stunting her growth.

Thapa’s novel also problematizes the Hindu Nepali identity through the protagonist Prema who is a girl from war ravaged village of Nepal. Being brought up in a typical Hindu religious background in a distant village of Nepal, she notices the faithful devotion of Nepali women to the Hindu religion and its practices. She remembers how her mother used to worship ammonite which is believed as an incarnation of Vishnu, a god of protection. Prema visits the temple of Mata Sylvia in America. There she notices the books of her own religion such as the *Bhaga-*

avad Gita, the *Mahabharat*, the *Ramayana*, and books about Osho, Krishnamurti, Vivekananda, Ram Das, Sai Baba, Aurobindo, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and she realizes that “It was the kind of place in which Prema’s mother would have sought refuge” (Thapa 2012, 179). But Prema herself does not find any refuge in her own religious culture. Rather it provokes Prema to fly away from her own ethnic identity where women are subjugated in the name of religion. When Mata Sylvia was speaking about the divine love, “Prema did not feel this love. Instead, she recalled her mother’s bedroom shrine, crowded with the gods: Krishna, Parvati, Shiva, Laksmi, the avatar of Bishnu in a fossil” (Thapa 2012, 180). She wonders that though her mother passionately devoted herself to the Hindu god and its rituals but “Had it made her feel safe? Even as her love for Prema’s father made her lose her life?” (Thapa 2012, 180).

Religious scripture plays a vital role to shape people’s thought and perception. When people follow a religion, its customs and rituals also become a part of their culture. In Nepali culture it was believed that “Only a son can open the gates of heaven” (Thapa 2012, 181). Therefore, Nepali orthodox parents desire to have a son so that their death ritual can be performed and their soul can be liberated after death. Prema’s parents had also wanted a son which brought about the untimely death of her mother and Prema witnessed it when she was a child. This event terribly injured her mind and “The

wounds of childhood, relics around which deposits have hardened, adamantine” (Thapa 2012, 15). She recalls this bitter incident in her conversation with her American boyfriend Luis: “She kept getting pregnant because she wanted a son! [...] one baby before me, two afterwards- they all died. And she- All she wanted was a son!” (Thapa 2012, 183). It is this scriptural misogyny that makes Prema hostile to Hindu religion. Religion is an important factor in all culture. Sachedina remarked that “Throughout history, women have been denied basic human rights, through religiously imposed restrictions or economically designed exploitation and manipulation of their position in family and in society” (Sachedina 2003, 11). In Prema’s understanding the scriptural text of *Manusmriti* also ascribes an inferior position on women and relegates them to be a mere slave as is evident in Prema’s statement “The book where it says women are slaves” (Thapa 2012, 183).

Nepali religious culture and her own ethnic identity that causes her mother’s death, traumatize Prema’s psyche. When a traumatic experience takes place, it changes the way a person thinks. It may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which develops in some persons who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. Prema’s mother’s death during childbirth shocked Prema very much. The trauma of child birth affects Prema’s intimate relationships both with Rajan in Nepal and Luis in America. She seeks fulfilment therefore in

casual sexual encounters without being bound by the institutions of marriage and motherhood. Her trauma makes compels her to escape from the emotions and institutions responsible for such trauma. Therefore, she wants to escape from the idea of childbirth: “Although well into the age of an arranged marriage, Prema had no desire to find a husband. A dread seeped through her at the thought of childbirth. She had seen it consume her mother” (Thapa 2012, 55). Her trauma tends to dissociate herself from the experience that is associated with her trauma. Prema also tells her boyfriend Luis that “I have never wanted to have children. Having children is dangerous” (Thapa 2012, 250). She does not want to follow her mother’s path who is a representation of typical Nepali woman and “In no way had she replicated her mother’s life” (Thapa 2012, 55). Rather she flies away into an alienated land by rejecting her typical Nepali ethnic identity. Berman, Montgomery, and Ratner in their article “Trauma and identity: A reciprocal relationship?” remarked that “Trauma can alter the course of identity development and destabilize existing identity commitments. Trauma, whether past or current, can also impact the resources a person brings to identity work” (Berman, Montgomery, and Ratner 2020, 31).

As an uneducated woman Prema’s mother is affected by the religious indoctrination and the typical notion of Nepali country. What is surprising is that the educated people also cannot liberate their mind. Prema notices

how a school teacher makes arrangement of marriage for her eighteen years old daughter. The school teacher couple called themselves progressive but they prepare her daughter's wedding after her passing out of high school. Further when their daughters became pregnant, the girl's mother says "If it's a son, her in-laws won't pressure her to have more children" (Thapa 2012, 60). Prema realises that both the educated people and the uneducated people are similarly interpellated by patriarchal discourses and attendant privileging of male children. It makes her realise that the spread of education in Nepal has not yet brought changes in the mind of the people who continue to remain grossly affected by gender discrimination. She, therefore, tries to evade her ethnic identity which hinders her development. It is in this way that traumatic events can cause a person to re-evaluate his/her identity.

Prema's lifestyle in America is interrupted by her traumatic memory from the past. Unlike other diasporic protagonists, she does not recollect the sweet memory of her homeland. When Prema learns about the war in Guatemala from her boyfriend Luis, she moves back to her own past. It actually brings forth her traumatic memory of war in Nepal which had been repressed. She tells Luis that "the war in Guatemala is like the war at home" (Thapa 2012, 172). The recollection of the fearful memory makes people more traumatic. In *Studies on Hysteria*, Breuer and Freud said that "Hysterics suffer mainly from

reminiscences” (Breuer and Freud 1966, 7). Prema becomes more eager to know more about Guatemala. She is curious to know about the refugees of the Guatemala war. When she learns from Luis about the disappearance and killing of two hundred thousand people, she was shocked. However, Luis’s mind was not affected as much as Prema’s mind was affected by the picture of the Guatemalans. This is due to Prema’s previous encounter with a similar kind of war. The memory of Maoist insurgency in Nepal deeply lacerates her mind. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth highlights the traumatic return and says that it is the “insistent return which thus constitutes trauma and points toward its enigmatic core” (Caruth 1995, 5). It is Prema’s return to the corrosive Maoist war in Nepal that constitutes her trauma.

As Prema had faced the similar kind of war-like situation in her native land, her reminiscence triggers post-traumatic stress disorder. Prema frequently visits library and each time she looked up more on Guatemala and “The more Prema found about Guatemala, the more she wanted to find out” (Thapa 2012, 163). She remembers the war in her early life by learning about the war in other people’s lives. As she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, she repeatedly relives her past days through thoughts and memories. Prema indulges in the thought of her father, her sister Bijaya who had joined in Maoist rebel movement, and the boy Kancha who was dragged to the police custody before disappearing.

When she is thinking about all these “She felt an ancient shivering in the marrow” (Thapa 2012, 168) which she had earlier felt during the war in her home country. This stirring of memorial past about her ethnic lands serves as the breach in her present diurnal existence. It startles her present life in her host land America. She was haunted by her severe memory: “Nepal was haunting her through tricks of the mind, Guatemala” (Thapa 2012, 203). She dwindles due to her painful memories. She starts to check the internet for news of home and she even calls her father after a long period. But her reminiscence was, however, not of a diasporic individual missing his homeland. It is her original trauma that entangles her in a loop of return and loss.

Being distracted by the memory she leads a nomadic existence and she has a sense of what some might call out-of-placeness. When Luis wanted to see Prema’s world, she cried by saying that “I do not have a world! I left the world I had, and do not belong in the one I am in now- your world” (Thapa 2012, 212). She is searching her path and she feels directionless and she is “tracing her way along her ever-directionless zigzag trail” (Thapa 2012, 216). After a long decade she moves to her birth village in Nepal. But she does not find any solace in Nepal either. She again moves back to America in search of a new life and personal fulfilment. She continually drifts from one place to another.

Identity is not a fixed entity. Ethnic identity which we can say is a social form of identity is also flexible. Circumstantial changes make one's ethnic identity fragile and unsteady. Prema takes a departure from her Nepali ethnic identity because of its socio-political scenario and the claustrophobic religious culture. She flies away from her ethnic land and experiences a world of fluidity and instability. To fit herself into the mainstream American culture, she transforms herself. Her assimilation into a new culture can be seen as a way to overcome the challenges and barriers that one faces in a new land. But it is difficult to erase one's ethnic identity, the inheritance of the past. The traumatic war that makes her fly away from her native land, the memory of that traumatic war again causes her to move back to her homeland. However, she finally returns in America and prefers to live in the liberated American multicultural society.

At the end, Prema settles in America and engages with the El Segundo Blue butterfly conservation. Prema has a resemblance with the transformational process that a butterfly undergoes. Butterfly has different stages of life: egg, caterpillar, pupa, chrysalis, and finally butterfly. The symbolic journey of the butterfly indicates the metamorphosis we all go through. Butterfly reminds us to rely on our transformational process. It can be troublesome and grievous when we outstrip a belief, relationship and habit. The same is true for Prema, she is confused and horrified as she moves from her known

world to a shadowy unknown world. Change is an important factor in life, therefore, Prema needs to let go of her traumatic past in order to create a better future. The cocoon is the comfort zone of the butterfly and if the caterpillar never emerges from this state the process of individualization will never find fruition. Prema flies away from her ethnic identity and her native land to transform into a new individual. Though she feels intense upheaval and uncertainty in the course of the journey, but the shift gives her “wing” to fly forward with confidence.

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Exploring Unbelonging: Negotiating the Concept of 'Home' in Neill Blomkamp's District 9

Adharshila Chatterjee

Home is Not Here: Unmaking Homes in the Post-colony

Douglas' 1991 essay highlights the localisability of home in the following statement - "The question is not "How?" nor "Who?" nor "When?" but "Where is your home?"" (Douglas 1991, 289) - thereby underscoring one of the foundational ideas associated with homes and home spaces - the notion of belonging in and to a specific, fixed place/space. Douglas' categorisation of homes and non-homes, thus, could be seen as a convenient starting point for our reconstruction and recovery of the imaginaries of 'home' from historically essentialist and romanticised conceptions, in the context of spatial

and political reconfigurations in the postcolonial Global South. Any critical attempt at exploring the evolving geographies and counter-geographies of homes/homelands, of belonging/un-belonging requires a concomitant understanding of the increasingly unstable topographies of home (from OE. *ham*, 'fixed residence or dwelling') and an acknowledgement of the gradual loss of fixity and rootedness that underwrite the etymological scope of the word. Thus, our negotiation with the concept of 'home' in the postcolony must be premised upon the broader scope and contexts of specific geopolitical and socioeconomic impetuses generated by what Hardt and Negri (2000) identified as the emergent global neo-Empire of the twenty-first century (Hardt and Negri 2000, Preface xii). The radical dialectics of 'home' are shaped and reshaped amidst the disorienting trajectories of different kinds of mobilities - economic migrations, internal and cross-border displacements, refugee crises etc. - resulting in new structures of power, governance and political/cultural/economic ecologies.

Exile - physical, political and cultural - becomes one of the most pivotal experiences that shapes the postcolonial subject. In South Africa, the public and private legacies of exile, both external and internal, manifest in culturally transmitted memories, stories and histories about the loss of home and homelands. In her study of the Masupatsela generation, Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki (2017) writes:

Being in exile is both about being en route, away from somewhere and towards somewhere else, and about never arriving—the arriving would only be the return to the initial place of home, and yet that is already a non-arrival as the home from which one left is no longer the same, and the person who left is no longer the same as the one who arrives back.

(Kropiwnicki 2017, 53)

Exiled bodies are always in transit, always mobile and yet never truly settled, plagued by an endless restlessness and rootlessness. Homes are rendered tenuous, as marginalised and (often) gendered subjects constantly transition through different mappable or unmappable places and non-places (Augé 1995), between the axes of homes and nonhomes. This deterritorialisation of homes as fixed spaces and loci of identity produces a sense of unbelonging that cannot be categorically reduced to only a political experience born of divisive governance, policy and socioeconomic practices. It must also be seen as a product of familial and institutional acculturation of racialised difference and performative identities. To exist as Other in spaces marked by colonialism is to bear and pass on the generational burdens of silence and trauma - to embody historically implanted lack, poverty, political erasure and marginality.

The postcolonial and diasporic subject is, thus, inevitably impacted by both the traumatic uncanny of homes-turned-nonhomes and the irrepressible drive

to replicate fantasies of belonging within/amidst non-home spaces, even as they compulsively aspire towards an emancipatory mobility. The spectres of home haunt the collective cultural memories and performative rituals of domestic living and knowing in the postcolony. In postcolonial discourses, the ideas of home as a private domain (distinct and separate from the public, while still allowing inside-outside exchanges) and a site of domesticity, familial economics, hierarchies, intimacies and violence allow for diverse heuristic approaches to navigate the politics of belonging and unbelonging. How and where can we begin to delineate the contours of this unbelonging? Could departures/arrivals from and to homes/nonhomes/homelands constitute a suitable parameter for charting this gradual erosion of the sense of belonging? Or should we extend our discourse beyond the question of mobility and embrace the uncomfortable reality that our experience of unbelonging is ultimately a direct psychospatial manifestation of processes and practices related to governance and policy-making in the postcolony? In the South African context, the spatialities of home/house are embedded in the historical precarities of segregationist urban and housing policies of the 20th century that were the primary tools of social and spatial control, implemented initially by the South African Party (and later, by the National Party) to ghettoise non-white populations and demarcate tangible racialised borders between white and non-white space/bodies/lives.

A historical overview of land and housing policies since the 1920s in South Africa demonstrates the clear economic agenda of white minority-led governments to actively restrict social and economic capital for non-white subjects. The Housing Act of 1920 and the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, for instance, were largely driven by massive socioeconomic and epidemiological anxiety over the 1918-19 Spanish Flu outbreak, leading to urgent implementations of urban housing policies for people of colour that would effectively allow authorities to isolate the infected, black working-class population to crowded and poorer sectors, away from the wealthy white communities (Vestbro 2012, 350; Mabin 2020, 454). An additional impetus was provided by the emergence of labour unions for black workers, which made it imperative for Apartheid administrators to enact and impose spatial control over these potentially disruptive politico-economic bodies (Vestbro 2012, 352). The strategic “spatialisation of race and racialisation of space” would reach its apotheosis during the Apartheid and would go on to produce a series of discriminatory policies that continue to inflict a legacy of privation on people of colour in South Africa (Lipsitz 2007, 10). These spatial tendencies to demarcate and designate separateness through land policies later fuelled Apartheid era legislations like the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act which led to the creation of rigid classifications and separate “townships” for different non-white racial groups. Iain Low (2005) illustrates this divide by contrasting the

architectural designs and cultural orientations of the typical three-bedroom “white” dwellings in gated communities and its low-cost “black equivalent” NE 51/9, referring to Non-European houses with three bedrooms, kitchen and dining for black South Africans permitted to reside in urban areas, which serves to exemplify the multi-dimensional effects of land and housing laws in manufacturing and sustaining transgenerational racial inequities that continue to debilitate the lives of working-class, non-white citizens of South Africa (Low 2005, 39). Aparthness was manifested and embodied in policy that turned homes into public templates of instantiated white dominance and racial hegemony.

No Homes/Nonhomes for Nonhumans: Mapping Alienation and Unbelonging in District 9

The origins of Anglo-American science fiction and related SF genres have been historically implicated in colonial fantasies and hysteria about exotic Others, along with a glorification of territorial and techno-scientific occupations by post-industrial, neo-colonial enterprises, thus delaying and complicating the possibilities of post-colonial interventions in emergent discourses around SF (Rieder 2013, 4). However, in 2004, Nalo Hopkinson had noted the incredible potential of reimagining SF narratives as disruptive tools of radical challenge against hegemonic representations of colonised subjects, recommending postcolonial writers to “take the meme of

colonizing the native, and from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it” (Hopkinson 2004, 9; quoted in Burnett 2015, 133). The post-colonial genealogies of SF genres, especially in Africa, must, then, engage with the complexities of navigating spectacular visions of Afro-futurism while negotiating and archiving the political, spatial and racial traumas that continue to haunt its people and communities. The contested scope and implications of the term “post/-colonial” itself centrally position colonial histories as points of both origin and departure for critical discourses on race, identity, body and space. In the context of South Africa, for instance, the visceral legacies of Apartheid have shaped the collective consciousness of the body politic and must, therefore, be accommodated within the critical frameworks of our inquiry into postcolonial SF narratives.

Neill Blomkamp’s 2009 SF film *District 9* is based on the director’s 2005 short film called *Alive in Joburg* where the residents of an impoverished township express their vitriolic and xenophobic views on “aliens” (Van Veuren 2012, 573). The title of *District 9* (though set in Johannesburg) carries obvious resonances of Cape Town’s District Six and its brutal history of forced dislocation, disenfranchisement and segregation. During the Apartheid regime, District Six was systematically purged of its black and “coloured” working-class residents in the 1960s, propelled by new principles and policies of “ur-

ban renewal,” and while Blomkamp’s cinematic engagement with the sordid memories of the Apartheid in *District 9* takes on largely allegorical forms, the overlaps and parallels between the spatial histories of District Six and the narratives of alienation and marginality in the film are obvious and apparent (Jethro 2009, 19). In fact, a number of academic works on Blomkamp’s film examine Johannesburg as a physical site of trauma and resistance tied to the Apartheid regime and go on to explore a multitude of issues such as xenophobia, segregation, the configuration of the post-Apartheid city, and the past and future of African urbanities (Raubenheimer 2021, 17). This paper builds upon those discourses to locate the spatial imaginaries of homes and nonhome spaces in Blomkamp’s alternate version of Joburg in relation to “alien,” othered bodies that inhabit the uncanny spaces of *District 9*’s militarised, segregated camps and ghettos.

Unsettling echoes of Apartheid emerge as the film opens with different characters detailing the arrival of an alien spaceship in 1982 in Johannesburg and proceeds to document, in highly biased and subjective narratives, the mass paranoia, escalating anger and disgust of the humans against the extraplanetary refugees, unfolding over the next twenty years and narrated mostly through snippets of old and current video footage. At first glance, *District 9* seems to feature the usual paraphernalia of an urban dystopia - from the arrival of an alien race from the outer space to advanced weaponry and bureaucra-

tised necropolitics - and yet it consistently defies narrative expectations by positioning the aliens (pejoratively referred to as “the prawns”, signifying “bottomfeeders” or scavengers) not as a neocolonial invading force but rather as terrified refugees, accidentally stranded in unfamiliar and inhospitable territory, firmly indicting the culture of speciesism, xenophobia and labour exploitation that typify the human-alien interaction in the film. The term “prawn” possibly also owes its origin to the “Parktown prawn”, a species of king cricket found in South Africa (Kapstein 2014, 159). The starving, helpless aliens are “rescued” from the mothership and granted temporary asylum amidst mounting international pressure and rising paranoia among human citizens, as violent politics of apartness and segregation begin to emerge from the outset, recorded in video testimonies of the human interviewees in the film (Rosello 2018, 36). The cinematic narrative employs a documentary format, communicating the past and the present through archival and current video footage. The panoptic gaze of the camera eye further underscores the impersonal nature of bureaucratic violence, deployed through discriminatory policies, hyper-paranoid security protocols and outright police/military aggression. The treatment of the prawns in *District 9* is framed within frighteningly familiar rhetoric of dehumanisation that is legitimised and normalised in the film, since the target group is, after all, non-human, visibly “alien” in every sense and, therefore, deemed expendable. The theme of alienation and the language of

apartness in the film is inextricably tied to the spatial politics of home and belonging, articulated through a visual grammar of marginality. One of the key scenes of the film is the aerial shot of *District 9* - comprising sprawling, heavily surveilled zones, filled with clusters of shanties that were originally designed to be temporary camps and nonhomes, built to both shelter and simultaneously confine the prawns. The scene evokes the inescapable spatial memories of black townships during the Apartheid. The aliens are emplaced in a “state of exception,” spatially located within the municipal and jurisdictional boundaries of Johannesburg and yet irrevocably separate and apart (Agamben 1998, 9; Price 2017, 238).

Perhaps the most visually significant spatial motif in the film is the looming silhouette of the suspended alien spacecraft, hanging over Johannesburg, that serves as the only physical link to a distant home planet for the dislocated, unhomed prawns and for their next generation, born on earth and yet never truly allowed to belong to their birth planet. The protagonist of the film is Wikus van de Merwe (played by Sharlto Copley) who is a mid-level employee at the Department of Alien Affairs at the MNU, his name overlaid with obvious associations with the buffoonish comic figure of Van der Merwe, which further highlights the localised cultural setting of the film (Kapstein 2014, 154). The narrative hinges on the transmutation of Wikus - from a bumbling and egotistical extension of the bureaucratic

machinery of the MNU to one of the prawns after an accidental contamination - and the consequent rupturing of the psychophysical borders between the familiar and the alien, the subject and the other. The story moves forward after a brief retrospective recounting of the arrival and subsequent condition of the extraterrestrials, narrated through multiple human voices, alternating between cautious and casually genocidal, as we arrive at the present moment of crisis in the film. The language soon devolves from scientific bewilderment to political hate-mongering and conspiracy theories. The film's present involves human agitation against the aliens and the impending removal and relocation of 1.8 million alien refugees from District 9 to District 10 - "from their present home to a better and safer location 200 kilometers outside of Johannesburg" (in Wikus' words, as he parrots the company propaganda) which leads to escalating confrontations between armed mercenaries and cornered, frightened aliens. The neoliberal corporation MNU (Multinational United) is appointed by the government to carry out the mass eviction. It is during this forced relocation that Wikus, the field officer in charge of the operation, is exposed to an alien fluid, triggering his quasi-Kafkaesque metamorphosis, portrayed in protracted scenes of visceral body horror, as Wikus's human body begins to unravel and come apart.

Navigating Apartness: Bodies Without Homes in
District 9

The first shots of the Alien Relocation Camp, with its heavily militarised grounds and barbed wire fences are incongruously juxtaposed against the spurious, cheerily ironic background narration by Wikus - “we have built a nice, new facility where the prawns can go and be comfortable,” underscoring the insidious nature of the bureaucratic necropolitics at play. The social ecology of the prawns is detailed through the film’s documentary-style narration which describes the slums of District 9 as sites of crime and violence: gambling, prostitution, addiction, gangs, illegal weapons trades etc. The racially-charged, xenophobic rhetoric surrounding criminality becomes a recognisable trope, used to justify the most inhuman of atrocities that are inflicted on the aliens. It quickly becomes apparent that it is, in fact, primarily the aliens who are targeted and exploited by human scammers. For instance, one of the scams run by Nigerian gangs is to sell cat food at extremely high markups to the prawns or to trade high-grade weaponry in exchange for cat food. Wikus, in one of the early scenes, uses cans of cat food as alternatives to tear gas shells to both diffuse tension and to trick prawns into signing the eviction notice. Unsuspecting prawns are frequently attacked, mutilated, and their body parts are consumed by Nigerian gang leaders in the hopes of gaining the power to use bio-engineered alien weapons. The film plays up the figures of Nigerian

crime bosses and drug lords, a common trope in South African media, mapping the uneasy power balance between these two groups of ‘aliens’ - the prawns and the Nigerians - who share the same “nonhome” i.e. the slums of District 9 (Kirsten 2018, 7). The complexities of the alien psyche and personality are systematically sublimated and reduced to static and redundant stereotypes of infantilism, savagery, weirdness and otherness. Rachel Tolen demonstrates the colonial and majoritarian construction of “dangerous classes” as largely built on the logic and language of disposability of certain kinds of bodies - “the unemployed, vagrants, the poor, criminals, drunkards and prostitutes” - that conveniently emphasise the need for reform through disciplinary intervention by institutional bodies (Tolen 1995, 81; quoted in Rosello 2016, 38). “Where there’s a slum, there’s crime,” says Sarah Livingstone (played by Nathalie Bolt), a sociologist who is also one of the interviewees in the film. The shacks and the slums, which serve as home spaces for the aliens, are, thus, preemptively encoded with socio-legal threats of deviancy, bodily/behavioral non-normativity, and criminality.

In the chaotic scenes following the beginning of the forced displacement, the majority of the prawns are characterised as “workers” - largely docile and infantile, lacking any direction or agency in the absence of proper leadership, their leaders presumably having died of disease. The neo-imperial and majoritarian disdain for

alien lives is repeatedly manifested in the films, as portrayed in a scene where Wikus discovers a shack filled with alien eggs and newly hatched babies and proceeds to cheerfully abort a couple of fetuses to demonstrate the workings of the makeshift alien “womb,” offering morbid souvenirs of the impromptu abortion to the camera crew. The film engages with the biopolitics of speciesist population regulation in the very next scene, which shows Wikus presiding over the destruction of the shack which served as a nest for eggs, excitedly comparing the sounds emitted from the burning eggs with the popping of popcorns: “The little guy, what’s left of him, pops out there.” As the lives and bodies of the aliens are repeatedly and callously violated in the film, the audience is forced to acknowledge and grapple with South Africa’s fraught history of xenophobia and bigotry, the term “alien” being commonly associated with foreigners, migrants, and non-native residents. Ashton L. Kirsten draws political parallels between the representation of xenophobia in Blomkamp’s film and the Gauteng incident of 11th May, 2008, when xenophobic violence had swept the province, leading to the deaths of sixty-two migrants, hundreds of rapes and assaults and rampant looting (Kirsten 2018, 2; Nord and Assubuji 2008, 2). The rapid peripheralisation of the prawns through physical displacement, internment and potential extermination is visually reinforced through the spatial spectre of the camp, ironically named “Sanctuary Park,” co-opting the non-humans - the vulnerable,

political Other - within Agamben's conceptualisation of "bare life" (Agamben 1998; Price 2017, 243).

The camera tracks the events following Wikus' appointment as a field officer - his initial jubilation and his actions as the officer in charge of the evictions - interspersing them with soundbites from his colleagues, family and friends in the aftermath of his exposure, their reactions ranging from pity and performative sympathy to sheer hostility. Cilliers Van Den Berg has connected Wikus' transmutation with the Deleuzian concept of "becoming" or "becoming-other" (Van Den Berg 2020, 1166). His transformation from perpetrator to victim begins with the modifications of the most visible and vulnerable site of identity - his body. His capacity and right to belong to the privileged, dominant group is gradually eroded, as involuntary anatomical and physiological changes become increasingly apparent. An inevitable disintegration and withering away of home accompanies Wikus' loss of human body and his descent into abject alienness. The undesirability and disposability of the "alien" body is always contiguous with the impossibility of belonging. The rapid dissolution of the protagonist's home, sense of self and the attendant possibilities of returning home is vividly shown in a visceral scene where Wikus attempts to amputate his infected arm after a call from his brainwashed and distraught wife (played by Vanessa Haywood). Wikus' infection triggers a series of spatial displacements - from his suburban home to the

hospital to the sterile torture chambers of MNU, used for illicit medical experiments on the prawns. Torture and psychophysical humiliation effect a complete and sudden loss of identity, agency and bodily autonomy. Wikus' bound and semi-transformed arm is operated by MNU officials as a tool to kill illegally captured aliens, his transitioning body a potential harvesting ground for "billions of dollars worth of biotechnology" and genetic capital. As his body is transformed into a "specimen" and a passive site of transaction, Wikus is permanently dislocated from the private, ordered, intimate realm of home and repositioned within the vicious circuits of the capitalist marketplace.

After Wikus breaks out of the MNU laboratories, in the ensuing media spectacle, he is falsely reported to be infected and disfigured as a result of "prolonged" interspecies sex with aliens. The public is warned of a potential contagion and asked to maintain physical distance of at least twenty meters, evoking the culture of public hysteria, stigma and misinformation around the AIDS crisis in South Africa as well as punitive histories of Apartheid laws of sexual regulation and censorship, such as the Immorality Acts and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (Kapstein 2014, 160). This further concretises Wikus' apartness, otherness and unbelonging in explicitly physical terms. As Wikus frantically tries to call for help and encounters only rejection from human friends and family, the alien spaceship hangs in the backdrop, a sin-

ister reminder of his irrevocable transgression of the borders between the human and the non-human, citizen and alien, subject and other. The film only peripherally engages with uncomfortable questions of race and gender by projecting them onto the othered, abject body of its protagonist. Under the panoptic gaze of the camera, his body bleeds, vomits, cries, tears, grows, breaks and reshapes itself into something else, something other. An important spatial association is established in the film between the aliens and trash heaps, alien bodies often seen sitting among, wading through and subsisting on waste. As mentioned earlier, the derogatory term “prawn” is connected not only to the aliens’ appearance, but also to their propensity for scavenging. Following his escape, Wikus is caught on camera as he hunts for food in the trash. Expanses of wasteland filled with trash constitute the spatial grammar of privation and abjection of unwanted, “excess” bodies - the “waste” of society - accumulating on the margins of the city, away from the resources and capital of the urban centres (Brophy and Malley 2020, 199).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa defines “borderlands” and borderland dwellers in the following way:

A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los at-

ravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal” (Anzaldúa 1987, 3).

Loss of home, expulsion from the sphere of normativity and the straddling of hybrid identities characterise the trespassers and transgressors who inhabit these unstable borders and thresholds. Spaces are volatile and fluid, produced and contoured by the performative rituals of existence and experiences that occur within them. The alien township now becomes a potential sanctuary and refuge as Wikus finally begins to experience a new, fragile sense of belonging and camaraderie in the company of an alien named Christopher (played by Jason Cope) and his young son, as they work towards a common goal - to steal the confiscated alien liquid from the MNU, to return the two aliens to the mothership and potentially reverse Wikus' metamorphosis. The second half of the film focuses on Wikus' psychopolitical transformation into a figure of rebellion and resistance - a familiar reworking of the white saviour trope - as he launches an attack against the MNU and helps Christopher and his son board the mothership, enabling them to return to their distant homeland, even at the cost of his own (Trinder 2019, 9). The spatial processes of the demolition of District 9 and the relocation of an ever-growing alien population to District 10 at the end of the film parallel the de- and reconstruction of Wikus' body into

a prawn. His exile from home is now absolute and permanent.

The romanticised ending of the film hints at Wikus' possible retention of human memory and impulses, as the last shot of the film catches him - now fully transformed - sitting among trash heaps and visually reconfiguring the ruins of home, memory and identity into the metonymic remnants of his humanity - in the form of hand-made items for his wife, created out of trash. District 9 is a fascinating political allegory about the instabilities of homes and borders, of belonging and unbelonging. Yet, there is no conventional triumph or glorified possibility of freedom that awaits the audience at the end of the film. Perhaps, Anzaldúa's formulation of "nepantla" or borderland can be applied to locate Wikus as the archetypal "in-betweeners", embodying the precarity and liminality of existence on the margins. Anzaldúa writes: "Those of us who live skirting the otros mundos, other groups, in this in-between state I call nepantla, have a unique perspective [...] the perspective from the cracks gives us different ways of defining the self, of defining group identity" (quoted in Keating 2005, 1). Wikus' previous desire to reintegrate with the dominant group is disrupted and sublimated by his traumatic assimilation with the disenfranchised and disempowered; and yet, as a perpetual borderland dweller, his existence remains, till the end, in a state of in-betweenness, trapped in the exclusionary psycho-spatialities of different borders.

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Review of Sayan Dey's *Performing Memories and Weaving Archives: Creolized Cultures across the Indian Ocean*. London and New York: Anthem Press, 2024. Paperback, 114 Pages. ISBN:9781839986901 ,£5.00, \$24.95

Reshma Khatun

Sayan Dey's analysis of creolized cultures offers a refreshing take on human-ocean relationship. Academic texts have often discussed man-ocean relationship in terms of commercial, political, economic and cultural exchanges by drawing references from various ethnographic and archival materials but in the Introductory Chapter Dey shifts the readers' focus on the "repertoires of greetings" or "patterns of greetings." According to Dey, this functions as a "tool" that has helped to develop linguistic and cultural bonds among diasporic communities in India and South Africa. This kind of analysis or idea that Dey proposes offers a novel perspective to the readers who try to understand the "conflictual" and

“collaborative” human-ocean relationship. However, it would have been better if the implication of this tool was explained in detail by the writer in the book. “Greeting” is a basic human gesture of introducing oneself to other but “how” this was exercised among the communities in different diasporic locations could have been discussed in greater detail. The title of the Introductory Chapter is catchy as the different terms used by different communities to greet one another are mentioned but what I find missing is the link between the title and the content of the chapter. Dey has discussed several books and articles published by twentieth century scholars; works of pre-colonial travelers; paintings and artworks featuring Indian and South African diasporic communities during the colonial period and has also given us a detailed historical account of how trade networks expanded between India and Africa in the precolonial time. Yet, the interpretation of greetings requires more investigation and analysis.

Readers of this book would, however, be satisfied with the explanations of the research methods that he has followed in his book. Dey has conducted interviews in semi-structured manner by selecting eleven research participants belonging to South African Indian diasporic community in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban, and four research participants coming from African Indian diasporic community in Gujarat with the help of snow-ball sampling method. As he is considering the oral narratives of the community, he has borrowed Irma

McClaurin's idea of "emvoicement" that interprets narratives of research participants through lived experiences. Dey is basically focusing on the active involvement of the participants who would no longer function as mere "information giver" but would contribute as active co-researchers. Another important research method that he proposes is the use of "kin study" instead of "case study" method where the narratives of both humans and nonhumans are accepted and valued. He also tries to follow Lorisia MacLeod's citation template model to cite the voices of "indigenous elders" and "knowledge keepers" thereby trying to be comprehensive in details and subject matter.

The idea behind weaving this project developed from the stories that the author heard when he was a child. The stories of an African king who had a kingdom in West Bengal in the late fifteenth century to some extent inspired him to write this book. Within his family too, the stories of migration were common as his grandparents and parents were actually migrants who migrated to West Bengal from Bangladesh during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Through his personal experiences Dey seems to relate to the position of those diasporic South Africans and Indians, and also correlate with the ambivalent space that they occupy.

These "archipelagic sociocultural spaces" that are created in India by the presence of African Indians is de-

scribed as “porous.” Dey further explains this porosity in cultural sphere by mentioning Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s arguments of “porosity” which she referred to in one of her lectures to draw comparison on matters flowing on both directions. Cultural narratives, according to Dey, function in a similar way, creating a two-way interaction. This argument becomes problematic in the Indian diasporic context because of the caste practices which limit such cultural penetration within the periphery itself. Dey mentions the drawbacks of caste practices in India, and how the idea of caste consciousness plays a crucial role in determining the identity of an individual. Now, if such is the case, how can then the phenomenon of porosity function so evenly in a society that operates on the basis of caste practices? The phenomenon of porosity therefore needs to be problematized to understand this cultural percolation which does not happen so uniformly among diasporic communities because these communities often belong to minor groups. The idea of “co-becoming” may seem romantic but the stories of struggles and pain that their experiences offer could have been addressed and discussed in this book. In the final chapter Dey mentions in general about “painful remembering” but unfortunately readers would not find any specific evidence to relate to such experiences.

There is also a detailed discussion on the complex narratives of “sacredscapes” that gave birth to the transoceanic worship cultures and interreligious folklores. The

use of Afro-Indian creole languages in religious songs not only give them different meanings but also help to develop a common feeling of togetherness. However, these religious and spiritual practices have their disadvantages too. Dey mentions the role of passenger Indians who through certain religious practices strengthen the caste-based division among Indians in South Africa, thereby instilling the idea of social hierarchy and disrupting the unity. These creolized forms of spiritual performances often seem to problematize the social space which is believed to promote an identity free of all prejudices. In music too this kind of segregation and selection are practiced. The creolized music that is produced by the performers, Dey mentions in Chapter Four of the book, resist assimilation or distortion of any kind. The creolized musical practices prove to be quite exclusive as they avoid mixing of music borrowed from outside their community. In case of culinary practices, contrarily, the examples that Dey cites highlight the cosmopolitan nature of these communities where native foods are prepared by using local Indian spices.

The title of the final chapter focuses on 'continuity' which suggests plans about adding more information in future and developing his understanding on diasporic communities in India and South Africa by revising some of his research ideas. But what this book lacks are the discussions on the ethnographic narratives of the struggles and resistance of the African Indians and the

South African Indians. The author has mentioned an example of the black miners of South Africa but apart from this nothing else has been documented. Records on the life and sufferings of African Indians need to be addressed so that historical analysis could be made to trace the changes within these communities. This book gives readers a broad picture of various cultural practices and performances taking place within the diaspora community but also confuses the readers as no specific timeline or period is mentioned. References are drawn from colonial, post-colonial and contemporary periods, and so it becomes difficult for readers to keep a track of the events discussed in the book.

Every book remains incomplete even after entering the print world. This book which is a product of hard work and labour, too has more to say and add. Apart from the shortcomings, this book discusses a topic that is quite relevant in today's time and also critiques the idea of cultural homogeneity which resists cultural assimilation. By citing his own personal experiences, Dey sympathetically explores the experiences of diaspora communities settled within and across nations. This personal emotional connection obviously highlights the appeal of the book.. So, Dey rightly points out when he says in the dedicatory page that his "transoceanic ancestors" always "bless" him in spirit. This (transcendental) connection may remind readers of some fairy tale moments that are often found in children's literature but this connection

between the author and aquatic entities actually serves as the starting point of this project but also prepares him intellectually and emotionally to document, archive and critique the oceanic and transoceanic cultures and linguistic practices. Sayan Dey's meticulously well-researched book should be read not only by the scholars but also by those interested in the stories of migration and diaspora.

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